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CONTEMPORARY BRITISH
DRAMATISTS. VOL. TWENTY

HIS
MAJESTY'S
PLEASURE

A Romantic Comedy
in Three Acts" by
CONAL O'RIORDAN
(NORREYS CONNELL)



Contemporary British Dramatists, Volume XX :

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

CONTEMPORARY BRITISH DRAMATISTS

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"HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE"

A ROMANTIC COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

By CONAL O'RIORDAN
(NORREYS CONNELL)



*"Il est vrai qu'il y a des hommes qui n'ont point
d'assez grandes qualités pour n'être pas obligés
de cacher leurs faiblesses."*

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TO JOHN DRINKWATER
FOR REMEMBRANCE

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THIS play first appeared in a somewhat slighter form, as a serial in the "Irish Review" under the editorship of Mr. Padraic Colum, in the autumn of 1912, and was at once translated into Dutch for Mr. Willem Royaards, the leading actor of the Netherlands. In November, 1915, the original version was presented, under the direction of Mr. John Drinkwater, at Mr. Barry Jackson's Birmingham Repertory Theatre, where it was only too flatteringly received by the Press though the frequenters of the theatre seemed a trifle nonplussed by it. In Mr. Drinkwater's production the then somewhat thankless rôle of Gilles was admirably filled by Mr. Stuart Vinden, whose recent retirement, through ill-health, is a grievous loss to his profession, if in some measure set off by his greater opportunity to impart his delightful art to the rising generation. The author was also much indebted (to name only a few among many) to the joyful robustness of the late Mr. Joseph Dodd as Brissac, and clever doubles of Durand and the Sergeant of the Guard by Mr. Ribton Haines (shortly after slain on the Western Front), and Mr. Ivor Barnard as the Prince of Condé and Jock Calvin. Most successful of all were the performances of Mr. Felix Aylmer, who lent the valet Gaston some of the servile dignity of a Malvolio, and Mr. Ion Swinley, whose elderly rake of a warrior king was an amazingly forceful achievement for an actor in his first youth.

The author confides that in swelling his play to the full measure of an evening's bill he has given more elbow-room to his characters without undue extension of his theme.

CHARACTERS IN THEIR ORDER OF APPEARANCE

LISETTE	<i>A young chambermaid at the Inn.</i>
MARGOT	<i>An elder one.</i>
BOILEAU	<i>A drawer at the Inn.</i>
JOAN DURAND	<i>A country woman no longer young.</i>
MICHEL DURAND	<i>Her Husband.</i>
TELLIER	<i>The Innkeeper.</i>
GILLES	<i>His son.</i>
ALIDA	<i>The Durands' daughter.</i>
BRISSAC	<i>A cavalier of the Prince of Condé's suite.</i>
TISSOT	<i>Another.</i>
THE PRINCE OF CONDÉ	
THE PRINCESS	<i>His bride.</i>
DELANNOY	<i>Another of his cavaliers.</i>
HENRI DE BALZAC	<i>The King's favourite and Captain of the Guard.</i>
THE KING	<i>Henry IV of France.</i>
SERGEANT OF THE GUARD	
BOBILOT	<i>A Musketeer of the Guard.</i>
CALVIN	<i>Another.</i>
GASTON	<i>The King's Valet.</i>

SCENE: *The Scene is laid at the Inn "Au Bonheur du Roy" at the outskirts of Donnemarie, a village in Picardy, close to the frontier of the Spanish Netherlands.*

TIME: *Three hundred years ago.*

ACT I: *The courtyard of the Inn on a fine March afternoon.*

ACT II: *The great bedroom of the Inn that night.*

ACT III: *On the high road outside the Inn the following morning.*

ACT I

ACT I

As the curtain rises the audience hears the sharp crepitation of heavy textiles beaten with flat sticks : they see the inn-yard, bounded to their left by the main building, with a door with a couple of steps to it and a window above it in the foreground ; a dovecot, another door and massive chimney-stack behind. The back of the stage is filled by a wall broken by an archway with double wooden gates standing open to show the roadway beyond. On the right they see outhouses, with a small gate leading to the stables.

Looking for the source of the noise, they see hanging from the yard gates curtains, and perhaps a carpet (though it is doubtful if such a thing could be found in a post-house in 1610), which MARGOT, a withered but still flamboyant old chambermaid, and LISETTE, a flamboyant young one, are beating. From road centre appears BOILEAU the drawer, pushing in front of him a barrel. Suddenly he stops, rears this on end, jumps on top and cuts a fantastical caper in the attempt to dance.

LISETTE: Will you look at the man?

MARGOT: I'd look at any man here in the country.

LISETTE: What are you dancing for, you idiot?

BOILEAU: What man wouldn't dance to think of the young master to be married to-morrow?

LISETTE: I'll teach you to dance for that. . . . What is it to you the young master being married to-morrow?

BOILEAU: Then I'll be the only bachelor in the house, and all true maids must chase me for my love.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

LISETTE: I'll chase you without any love.

[Knocks him off the barrel and drives him back into the road, then returns to beat savagely at her curtains.]

MARGOT: And what is it to you, my dear, young Master Gilles being married to-morrow?

LISETTE: Don't you know very well that he's kissed me many a time?

MARGOT: I won't deny I'm a knowledgeable woman, but I never knew of his kissing anyone.

LISETTE: Don't you believe what I tell you?

MARGOT: I daresay many a man has kissed you, and why shouldn't they?

[BOILEAU peeps round gate.]

LISETTE: I wouldn't let every man kiss me.

MARGOT: Not every man will have a mind to.

[BOILEAU returns to his work rolling the barrel.]

LISETTE: Do you think I'd let that lad there kiss me?

MARGOT: You would if you could get no better. And so would the Queen of France herself.

BOILEAU: The Queen, is it? Indeed, I'd be afraid of my life of royalty.

LISETTE: I wouldn't demean myself like the Queen of France. I'd rather die an old maid like you.

MARGOT (*much amused*): You'll never get the chance to die an old maid like me.

LISETTE: And why not, I'd like to know?

BOILEAU: Because you've more than half a chance to wed with me.

LISETTE: Be off out o' that!

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

MARGOT: I lived at Court, my dear; I was maid to a maid-of-honour; that's the sort of old maid I am.

BOILEAU: Don't be putting grand notions in the girl's head.

LISETTE: I'm sure I don't know what you mean. . . . It must be grand to live at Court. . . . But I think I'd rather have a man of my own.

BOILEAU: Of course you would. . . . Here I am. . . . Take me now while you've got the chance.

LISETTE: Be off now, I say, once for all. (*Chases him out again, this time into the house by the outer door.*) I'd think it more natural like to have a man of my very own.

MARGOT: Natural, yes it is, no doubt. But what they call in Paris "Rustic." Not what a lady nor yet a gentleman expects.

LISETTE: I'm not a lady or a gentleman.

MARGOT: The only woman even here in the country I knew for sure had a man of her own was Master Gilles' poor mother.

LISETTE: The mistress that's dead? . . . Master Gilles' mother . . . that died so young?

MARGOT: That's what I say. . . . She had a man of her very own.

LISETTE: She died of the plague?

MARGOT: She did. Of her plague of a plague of a husband.

LISETTE: D'ye mean to say so?

MARGOT: Ay! And that though the Lord of the Manor himself . . . But what's the good of crying over spilt milk?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

LISETTE: But how do you know for sure she found her man a plague?

MARGOT: Hasn't he been a plague to me ever since?

LISETTE: I often heard that now, but I never believed it.

MARGOT: And I didn't believe his son kissed you. So we're quits on that. . . . Oh, it's an awful thing to settle down, my girl, never do it as long as you live.

LISETTE: I never will unless I get the right man.

MARGOT: You won't do that unless he drops down the chimney.

LISETTE (*with a glance over the dovecot*): I hope he won't drop down the chimney in the best room to-morrow night.

MARGOT: Art afraid of his finding Alida there instead of you?

LISETTE: I wouldn't trust the shrew with any man; . . . And to think it's she that's going to marry the young master, just because she's seven cows and I've none. It's enough to make you hate the aristocracy.

BOILEAU (*putting his head out of window above, sympathetically*): As if he hadn't more cows already than Old Taurus knows what to do with!

MARGOT (*commandingly*): Be off, my man; or you'll hear no good of yourself.

[BOILEAU *disappears*.]

LISETTE: They say the master knows nothing about COWS.

MARGOT (*tossing her head*): Nor about women neither

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

LISETTE: Did you ever know a man knew anything about women?

MARGOT (*pensively*): I did. . . . One and one only.

LISETTE (*thoroughly interested*): Tell me now, and who was that?

MARGOT (*impressively*): The highest in the land. . . . The King.

LISETTE (*disappointed*): The King. . . . I'm never like to lay eyes on him. I don't see myself going to Court, nor His Majesty coming to Donnemarie.

MARGOT (*laughing*): The King once came to Donnemarie.

LISETTE: The King has been here?

MARGOT: Ay! And maybe that is why Alida Durand has seven cows.

LISETTE: D'you mean to say?

MARGOT: I mean to say that Joan Durand is the deepest, secretest woman in Donnemarie. . . . Here she comes with her fool of a husband and my old plague of a man, wrangling over Alida's dowry still. . . . Let's bring the curtains in. They're clean enough for them that use them.

LISETTE (*as door down stage opens, showing TELLIER and the DURANDS*): Ay, clean enough for her. . . . I wish all her cows may die in the wedding-night!

[*She and MARGOT carry off the curtains at back while there come down the steps MADAME DURAND, a pleasant elderly woman, her husband MICHEL, a shopkeeper farmer, and TELLIER the innkeeper. Both*

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

men are about fifty. DURAND is markedly optimist and TELLIER pessimist ; but both are, in fact, equally thriving in a modest way.

TELLIER (*shaking his grumbling head*): Ah no, no, no, no, no ! These are hard times, my neighbours, hard times. I never knew trade so bad. Since the wars are over there's so much to drink and so few to drink it, I ask you now how is a poor innkeeper to make both ends meet? . . .

DURAND: Faith, I'll come and drink it with you myself an none else will. . . . And I warrant ere the bout's done all ends will meet and overlap. Come, when one talks of a wedding-day one talks not of bad trade.

TELLIER: Your daughter's seven cows won't keep my wine from going sour—and when trade's bad what else can one talk of but bad trade, wedding-day or no wedding-day?

DURAND (*invincibly friendly*): One talks of happiness, Master Tellier.

TELLIER: I do not hold with you at all, Master Durand.

MADAME DURAND: Why, think you, has one a wedding-day but to content young people?

TELLIER: I am not a young person.

DURAND: You were young once.

TELLIER (*cautiously*): May be so, Master Durand, but I was never content.

DURAND: Yet you married young.

TELLIER (*with growing irritation*): Too young.

DURAND: Come, come, neighbour, you were not so young but you remember your wedding-day as the happiest of your life?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

TELLIER (*sullenly*): I remember my wedding-day as the most damnable day I ever passed.

DURAND (*shocked*): 'Twas never your good wife to blame. She that lived honestly by thee fifteen good years till the plague took her, as it took the curate and the bishop, though the last was a great man and a saint of God. (*Lifting his hat.*) Ha' mercy on him.

TELLIER: Ay, and it took another great man that was no saint of God, though they buried him beside the bishop and put the handsomer stone over him.

DURAND (*exchanging a glance with his wife, who coughs*): Ah . . . the last lord of the manor. Was it he who spoilt thy wedding-day?

TELLIER (*nodding*): May the ghost of his tombstone pinch him in hell!

DURAND (*piously*): Amen, amen. But think, friend: those evil days are gone. There will be no lord's cruelty to spoil the wedding to-morrow when your boy marries my girl.

TELLIER: Wait till to-morrow be passed, say I.

DURAND: Come, neighbour, no ill talk will fright us. Since good King Henry came upon the throne——

TELLIER: There has been great naughtiness at Court.

MADAME DURAND (*contemptuously*): What know you of Courts?

TELLIER (*bitterly*): I know more of Courts and kings' ways than you think.

[*He looks hard at her, but she meets him unflinchingly.*]

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

MADAME DURAND: I think no more than another, Master Tellier.

DURAND: 'Tis not for you who hold the King's licence to dispraise His Majesty.

TELLIER: I say naught against the King, but I would not have him license my daughter too.

DURAND: This is not the Court: though the King foul his own nest, he lets honest men go free.

TELLIER: I have heard he is chasing the Prince of Condé through the land to take his newly-wed princess from him.

DURAND: Come, come, the King is as old, or older, than you or I. (*Appealing to his wife who has stood aside.*) Joan, is it not so?

MADAME DURAND (*turning back to them*): The King? Ay, I remember years and years ago, when they fought the Spaniards yonder by the mill and down in Montjoye's meadows. . . . He lay at my father's house that night. He was a man then. I was still a girl. 'Tis long ago. (*Coming down to them.*) I am an old woman. He is older still.

[*Goes up to gateway and looks out over the fields.*]

TELLIER (*hardly*): Kings never grow old. They are not working men.

DURAND: Well, I thank God my daughter, though fair and upright as a lily, is no flower for a king to crop. I would as soon be fearful of my old wife there as of my daughter.

TELLIER: They say at times all cats are grey.

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DURAND (*slightly vexed*): I'll have you know my daughter is neither cat nor grey, but fair and virtuous, and knows her station.

TELLIER (*giving ground*): Well, pray Heaven she knows no other station than my son. Here he comes, and I warrant no king in France has a handsomer face than he.

[*Points through archway.*]

DURAND: And see how my daughter follows him, loving and innocent as lamb follows shepherd.

TELLIER: I never saw lamb follow shepherd yet, but I have seen a butcher follow a lamb.

MADAME DURAND: Out on your ill-nature! You are no father worthy so brave a son.

TELLIER: I hope your daughter may be saying as much next week.

DURAND: Let's stand aside and watch them. . . .

TELLIER: I think they are quarrelling already.

DURAND (*taking them beside inn door*): Hist!

[*Enter through archway GILLES, a strapping young country fellow, followed by ALIDA, a fine figure of a girl.*]

ALIDA (*pleadingly*): Will you not listen to me?

GILLES (*angrily*): No!

ALIDA (*tired*): You won't listen to me?

GILLES: No!

ALIDA: Then I'll not run after you any more.

GILLES (*turning round surprised*): Why not?

ALIDA: I'll not have you make a fool of me like you did Lisette.

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GILLES: 'Tis you lasses who make a fool of me.

ALIDA: Your father did that before Lisette or I was born.

DURAND (*delighted*): My girl has wit! My girl has wit!

TELLIER: I wonder where she got it!

GILLES: If my father made me a fool, he made me an honest fool.

ALIDA: D'ye mean I'm not honest?

GILLES: I'd be a proved fool to say so before to-morrow.

ALIDA (*enraged*): You'll have nothing to say about me to-morrow.

GILLES (*alarmed*): What d'ye mean?

ALIDA: There are as good hinds in the fields as you.

GILLES: Ay, and as many furrows.

ALIDA: Y'are unmannerly.

GILLES: I'd ha' been a good mate, anyhow.

ALIDA: I'll marry a man with more way with him.

GILLES: You'd provoke a saint of heaven.

ALIDA: Had I known you were a saint of heaven I'd never have taken you.

GILLES: But take me you did, and maybe your saint has a touch of the devil in him.

[Seizes her suddenly, and kisses her with clumsy passion.]

ALIDA: Paws off! Saucy Satan the Saint unmasked. (*Boxes his ears and shakes him off.*) I think 'tis true what Lisette says after all.

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GILLES: And if it is . . . what are you after now?

ALIDA: No kissing till the time comes.

GILLES (*grumpily*): May the time never come—if you treat me like that! You spitfire . . . you——

ALIDA: I'll teach you to call names, you tyrant!

[*Rushes at him, but he eludes her and runs off into stableyard, she pursuing him fiercely.*]

TELLIER: I'll after them, she'll scratch his eyes out!

DURAND: Not she, she'll kiss her own reflected beauty in them.

MADAME DURAND: This is a lovers' quarrel.

TELLIER: A little more love and I lose my heir.

DURAND: A little more love, neighbour, and your heirs are mine.

TELLIER: Come through the yard and I'll send him back to keep house while I'm away.

[*DURAND is about to follow TELLIER when his wife's voice stays them both.*]

MADAME DURAND: What is this talk about Lisette?

DURAND (*deprecatingly*): About Lisette . . .?

TELLIER (*passing it off*): About Lisette? . . . Was there talk about Lisette?

MADAME DURAND: Ay, Master Tellier . . . do you let your son kiss your maids?

TELLIER (*shocked*): A son of mine kiss any maid! Whoever heard of such a thing?

MADAME DURAND: If I thought he had there would be no marriage to-morrow.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

TELLIER: What? . . . And the stable bedded down for the cows and all? Would you spoil all our happiness, Madame Durand? And all for one little kiss . . .? I'll send the girl away now, whether he's kissed her or not, rather than disappoint the cows. (*Calls.*) Lisette! Come here, you girl! (*Lisette runs in.*) What do you mean by it? How dare you?

LISETTE (*defiantly*): Dare what?

TELLIER: Kiss my son. . . . Whatever made you think of doing it?

LISETTE: Me kiss your son? . . . Your son . . .!

TELLIER: Ay, my son, whose else son would he be?

LISETTE (*facing all three*): I'd no more think of kissing your son than old Margot would think of kissing you.

DURAND (*bursting into a mighty laugh*): Ho! ho, ho, ho, ho, ho!

TELLIER (*overcome*): I'll, I'll . . . I'll find out from Gilles what you did to him. . . . I'll go and ask him now. . . . And we'll come down together to fetch the cows this, this happy day. [*Exit.*]

MADAME DURAND (*still with her eyes on LISETTE*): Did Gilles ever kiss you?

LISETTE (*demurely*): Master Gilles would no more think of kissing me than His Majesty the King would think of kissing you.

DURAND (*suddenly grave*): Hum, hum! . . . We'd better be getting back, my dear, if they're coming for the cows.

[*Moves away towards stableyard gate and makes off, leaving his wife and LISETTE still facing each other.*]

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LISETTE (*awed by the steadiness of JOAN DURAND's eyes*): He didn't kiss me . . . I kissed him, but he never gave it back. . . . I think he's a bit of a lad . . . but he loves your daughter right enough.

MADAME DURAND: And you love him?

LISETTE: I did, but I don't, and that's the truth. . . . He's much too good for me.

MADAME DURAND: Too good . . .? You mean too dull?

LISETTE (*nodding*): Yes, ma'am.

MADAME DURAND: I think so too. . . . But Alida's her father's child. . . . (*Takes LISETTE's face in her hands and kisses her on the forehead.*) Thank you, child. I hope you'll get the right man.

LISETTE (*gratefully*): Thank you, ma'am. . . . Did you ever hear of a man dropping down the chimney?

MADAME DURAND (*laughing*): You want to know too much. . . . Good-bye!

[*Follows her husband to stableyard.*]

LISETTE (*calling after her*): I hope your daughter will be very happy . . . and that her cows won't die . . . though it's a sad time they'll have here, poor things!

MARGOT (*putting her head out of window above, as far away upon the road a scurrying sound rises*): Well, you're the girl and no mistake!

LISETTE (*almost pensively*): What sort of a girl am I?

MARGOT: Some man will know some day.

LISETTE: Hark! Do you hear a great noise on the road?

MARGOT: Ay, and see great dust driving down it. Here's company coming, and coming fast.

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LISETTE: And everyone but ourselves and Boileau out, and he's no good at all. Or maybe it's only the master bringing home the cows?

MARGOT: They'd be queer cows kicking the dust against the sky. . . . You'd better come in and close the door.

LISETTE (*as the hubbub grows*): Mayhap it's the Spanish army come over the Meuse. . . . I wouldn't like to be ravished. . . . I'd feel safer with the gates closed . . . (*As she closes the inn gates to road.*) Now if they knock we can send Bibi Boileau to open it.

[*Exit to house.*

[*The noise in the distance rapidly grows. Clatter of hoofs, rumble of wheels, cracking of whips, clicking of steel, etc. Finally a battering and shouting at the gate which threatens to give way, when BOILEAU comes out in fear and trembling, opens it and then flees for his life indoors. Two dismounted cavaliers, the first of them by name BRISSAC, an unmistakable blade, the other TISSOT, an ordinary man, fling back the gates and enter, disclosing a carosse with a lady and gentleman in it in the road.*

BRISSAC: House! House! Horses! Horses! Relays at once! (*Looking round.*) Where the plague has the fellow got to that opened the gate?

TISSOT: In here belike.

[*Points to door.*

BRISSAC (*with a great thump of his whip on door*): Break it in if no one answers. (*Leaves TISSOT banging at door and goes back to carosse with a perfunctory salute.*) This is the

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

post-house, my Prince. Will Your Highness descend while relays are found?

PRINCE (*within carosse, head at window, angrily*): Are there no horses ready?

BRISSAC (*crisply*): None to see, my Prince, ready or unready.

PRINCE: If I were King of France . . .

BRISSAC (*impatiently*): If the moon were green cheese! (*To the postboy who comes in from road examining a broken trace.*) Have they horses here or not?

POSTBOY: Ay, Master Tellier has plenty of horses, but you'll have to pay for them.

BRISSAC (*peremptorily*): I'll pay for them, or someone shall. . . . Break down that door!

[TISSOT *flings all his weight against it, it gives way, and he falls over BOILEAU, both sprawling on the ground.*

BRISSAC (*disentangling BOILEAU and lifting him by the crop of the neck*): Hulloo! Fellow, have you any horses?

BOILEAU (*aggrieved*): Horses? Me? No, I have but my keep and what the guests please to give me.

TISSOT: Fool! Has your master horses?

BOILEAU: Ay has he, and cows. . . . Seven more coming . . .

TISSOT (*delighted*): Seven horses!

BOILEAU: Seven cows.

TISSOT (*offering to strike him with his whip*): Cows! Imbecile!

BRISSAC (*interposing*): Where is your master?

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BOILEAU: I doubt he's with the young master, his son.
. . . At least they say——

BRISSAC (*losing patience*): And where is the young master?

BOILEAU: I doubt he's bringing home the cows.

BRISSAC: Damn the cows! . . . We want horses.

BOILEAU: So I hear you say. . . . But it's cows he's bringing.

BRISSAC: Are there no horses anywhere?

BOILEAU: Where should we be without horses?

BRISSAC: Who's in charge here?

BOILEAU: Me and the maids.

BRISSAC: Maids? Call your maids then. Maybe they can give us what we want.

BOILEAU: Easy now. D'ye think they keep horses under their beds?

BRISSAC (*looking round desperately*): The horses must be somewhere.

BOILEAU (*complacently*): You'll get no horses here to-day.

BRISSAC and TISSOT (*turning on him impatiently*): And why not, sirrah?

BOILEAU (*inadvertently commencing to dance*): Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

TISSOT: Stop laughing, or I'll brain you!

BRISSAC: What are you dancing for?

BOILEAU: 'Cause the young master's to be married to-morrow.

BRISSAC: What has that to do with it?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

BOILEAU: We'll want the horses to bring home the bride.

PRINCE (*leaping out of the carosse in a rage*): There is a bride here to be brought home by all the horses in France.

BOILEAU (*falling on his knees, frightened*): O good my lord! Is it the King's own dollymop?

PRINCE (*in a rage*): Scandal! Scandal! Crop me the rascal's ears!

BOILEAU: Mercy! Mercy!

[*Flees into house pursued by BRISSAC and TISSOT.*]

PRINCE (*pacing up and down the yard in a fury*): Scandal! Scandal! Most monstrous; most horrible!

PRINCESS (*who is very young but extremely rusée, descending from carosse*): My Prince, my Prince, what can scandal harm us? Soon we shall be across the frontier, soon at Brussels, under the protection of the Archdukes, and then——

PRINCE: More scandal! Brussels thrives on scandal!

PRINCESS: You will force Brussels to remember that I am the Prince of Condé's wife.

PRINCE: I cannot force Brussels to forget that you were the Queen of France's maid-of-honour, which is no honour at the Court of Henry the Amorous.

PRINCESS: No one dared speak light of me there.

PRINCE: There you had the King's protection.

PRINCESS: Now I have yours.

PRINCE: I am not a sovereign prince—and if I were, there is no prince temporal or spiritual dare face King Henry.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

PRINCESS: What help can the Archdukes give us?

PRINCE: Heaven only knows. There will be bloody wars to pay for this escapade.

PRINCESS (*bitterly*): Rather than that, had we not better wait for the King? He cannot be a league behind us on the road.

PRINCE: No, no, perdition! no. . . . If we had horses

PRINCESS: He can get horses, too. . . . Sooner or later you must yield me to him.

PRINCE: No, no . . . a chance remains.

PRINCESS: A chance remains?

PRINCE: Soft in your ear. . . . There is a plot afoot to kill the King.

PRINCESS (*excited and troubled*): You dare kill him?

PRINCE: I? No. . . . I am his cousin. But as Henry gallops, Death gallops with him.

PRINCESS: Tell me more

PRINCE: You know enough. All turns on this. If he do not overtake us here, Death overtakes him ere he goes further. (*Rapping at inn door.*) Horses! Horses! Horses!

[*Enter GILLES from yard hastily.*

GILLES: My lord . . . my lady . . . my father is abroad. Does no one serve you?

PRINCE: Who are you?

GILLES: The King's postmaster's son, so please you.

PRINCE: Then find me horses—four, and fleet ones.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

GILLES: It shall be done at once, my lord . . . (*bowing to her*) my lady.

[*Exit to yard.*]

PRINCE: That's a great galliard.

PRINCESS: He seems the sovereign prince of Donne-marie.

[*Re-enter GILLES.*]

GILLES: The horses come from pasture, but they're fleet ones. Can I not serve my lord to some refreshment? . . . my lady . . . ?

PRINCE: Horses! Horses! Horses!

PRINCESS (*reprovingly*): Prince, I want food.

GILLES: Madame, I have food worthy a princess—baked for a wedding-feast.

PRINCESS: My mouth waters. Hand me in, Prince.

[*The PRINCE does not stir. She gives her hand to GILLES, but the PRINCE wakes up and thrusts him aside.*]

PRINCE: We lose precious time. (*Aside to PRINCESS.*) You know I have no money. (*To GILLES, haughtily.*) See that the horses are put to at once.

GILLES (*bowing them both into house*): It shall be done, my Prince . . . Princess! (*When they are gone, his eyes following, into house, he kisses his hand and gazes after them still.*) Oh, exquisite Princess! Oh, fortunate wedding-feast! Oh, happy, happy Gilles. At last you know True Love, love at first sight and hopeless! (*Runs out of gateway.*) Her carriage where she sat! (*Takes out the cushions, one in each hand, brings them into yard, eyeing them tenderly.*) Thrice blessed cushions! (*Kisses one of them.*) Where she

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

sat. . . . Or was it this one? (*Kisses the other.*) Oh! what a thing it is to know true love! (*His ecstasy is broken by a scream from within and a scuffle of feet. He immediately starts to beat the dust out of cushions against gatepost, while LISETTE runs down the steps from indoors pursued by BRISSAC. He chases her round barrel and round GILLES, and so on, and is still so employed when GILLES puts up his hand commandingly.*) She calls! . . . Coming, my Princess, coming!

[He runs into house leaving the pair still playing. At last BRISSAC drops down panting on the steps.]

BRISSAC: I'm too old.

LISETTE (*laughing in spite of herself*): You're old enough to know better.

BRISSAC: I pray the good gods I'll never be so old as that.

LISETTE: Oh! Where do you expect to go when you die?

BRISSAC: I am one of the blessed who expect nothing.

LISETTE: But you must die one day, you know.

BRISSAC (*nodding coolly*): Ay, and as likely as not within an hour.

LISETTE (*interested and even touched, with a movement towards him*): D'ye mean that?

BRISSAC (*smiling*): Sure! And you won't kiss me?

LISETTE (*recoiling slightly*): I never heard of such a thing.

BRISSAC: Never heard of a lovely young maid comforting with a kiss a poor old soldier?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

LISETTE (*with increasing suspicion*): You won't come the old soldier over me.

BRISSAC: And I ridden all the way from Paris to-day!

LISETTE (*interested*): From Paris, did you? (*Breaking off determinedly.*) What's that to me?

BRISSAC (*rising, very plausibly*): You ask me that, and here am I beside you begging for a kiss?

LISETTE (*coily*): I was told to-day that the man for me has got to drop down the chimney.

BRISSAC (*with a bold sweep towards her*): Bring me to the chimney and I'll drop down it now.

LISETTE (*not entirely putting aside the proposal*): The only chimney you could drop down here is the one in the great bedroom.

BRISSAC (*struck by this piece of information*): The great bedroom? . . . That has a big chimney in it?

LISETTE: Ay, the great bedroom. (*Pointing.*) That's the stack of it you see over the dovecot; it's not every man could climb over there.

BRISSAC: Every man wouldn't want to, my dear. Not even for you.

LISETTE (*struck*): You're the second one to say that to me to-day.

BRISSAC: The second man?

LISETTE: Never mind.

BRISSAC (*coming close to her*): Lie there to-night, sweetheart, and shalt see me drop down the chimney.

LISETTE: Fie! How can you? (*Bashfully.*) As if I'd ever lie in the gentry's bedroom.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

BRISSAC: Tut! A modish young lady like you with provincial notions! I'll not believe it. There, that's a compact now, that I drop down the chimney, and here's a kiss to seal the bond.

LISETTE (*eluding him*): Let me be, you villain! When you talk like that I wouldn't kiss you, not to save you from the gallows.

BRISSAC (*unperturbed*): Ay would you, and cut the rope with your teeth to warm my poor old body in your arms.

LISETTE (*shaken*): There's talking! . . . You're not by any chance the King of France?

BRISSAC (*undecided to say whether he is or not*): The King. . . . What makes you ask if I am the King?

LISETTE (*suddenly shy*): I was told to-day that the King . . . that the King . . .

BRISSAC (*encouragingly*): Well . . . That the King . . .?

LISETTE (*putting her apron-corner in her mouth*): Only I thought he might be a little bit like you.

BRISSAC (*with humorous bitterness*): Maybe I could have played his part if Fate had cast me for it.

LISETTE (*recovering herself*): Oh, you're no more than a player, all wind and talk.

BRISSAC: No more than that am I? (*Catching her deftly in his arms.*) We'll see.

[*He is on the point of kissing her after a laughing struggle when she points over his shoulder at inn steps, down which comes TISSOT with a wine cup in one hand and a long pipe in the other.*]

LISETTE: Will you shame me before him?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

BRISSAC (*releasing her, with affected sternness*): A cup of wine for me, girl, and none of your sauce.

LISETTE (*curtsying with her tongue in her cheek*): My lord shall have of the best.

[As she runs up steps blows a kiss at him from behind TISSOT's back and exit.]

TISSOT (*having thrown a glance around to be sure they are alone*): How far behind think you the King is now?

BRISSAC: Two hours or three. . . . Or would be but for the foundering of our leaders at La Ferté.

TISSOT: We lost near a glass there and have not travelled half the pace since.

BRISSAC: Still, I make him a full hour behind. Spanish Miguel would be after us if the chase pressed much closer, and Dellanoy if it came within the league. . . . Dost hear a horse?

TISSOT (*going up to gateway and looking out*): I see nothing.

[As he stands with his back to BRISSAC, LISETTE comes down inn steps with wine for BRISSAC.]

BRISSAC (*taking it*): Wine . . . And what else, mistress?

LISETTE: Naught until I know more about you.

BRISSAC: And then more naught, fair mistress.

LISETTE: You wouldn't talk to me like that were I a lady.

BRISSAC: God forbid I should have truck with ladies. Honesty comes before all, and the ladies I know have it not.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

LISETTE: Maybe you lost it for them.

BRISSAC (*catching her*): Sauce me no sauce.

[*Is about to kiss her when a straw pillow falls on their heads out of the window above. Looking up they perceive* BOILEAU.

LISETTE: I see you.

BOILEAU (*indignantly*): I saw you.

LISETTE: And if you did?

BOILEAU: It isn't "if," I did.

BRISSAC (*sternly*): Did you throw that pillow at me?

BOILEAU (*with a change of tone*): Oh no, no, it fell.

BRISSAC: Come down here and pick it up.

BOILEAU: I . . . I really mustn't. . . . I'm busy.

[BRISSAC makes a threatening movement towards him, his head disappears and BRISSAC is again about to kiss LISETTE when a horse is heard off.

BRISSAC (*forgetting all about LISETTE*): That's a horse now.

TISSOT (*from archway*): Is that not one of ours on the crest of the hill?

BRISSAC: Is't Miguel?

TISSOT (*dropping his pipe*): It is Dellanoy.

BRISSAC: We are lost if the horses come not. Summon the Prince.

[*Exit TISSOT to house.*

LISETTE (*pouting*): And so I don't matter any more?

BRISSAC (*putting his arm round her*): Matter, sweetheart? . . . Never more than now. You must be mine for ever.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

LISETTE: You understand it's honourable marriage?

BRISSAC: What else?

[Looks at her with surprise.]

LISETTE (*dropping her eyes*): I didn't say anything about anything else.

BRISSAC: No more did I.

LISETTE: What then?

BRISSAC: Least said soonest mended. (*Pointing.*) That is the chimney-stack?

LISETTE: What do you mean?

BRISSAC: The chimney-stack of the great bedroom.

LISETTE: What has the great bedroom to do with you or me?

BRISSAC: Am I not to drop down the chimney?

LISETTE: Oh, I don't believe a word you say!

BRISSAC: Very well then, one kiss before we part. (*He is about to kiss her when enter DELLANOY through the archway and BRISSAC, releasing LISETTE who runs into the house, cries :)* Where is Miguel?

DELANNOY: Miguel is a prisoner. The King himself took him and had taken me but I snapped my pistol at him.

BRISSAC: Was he wounded?

DELANNOY: His horse was, and I could have sworn the bullet went through his hat, and I doubt the King has a rope for me if we meet again.

BRISSAC: We all swing together. To cross the King's love affairs is high treason.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

DELANNOY: But our master the Prince——

BRISSAC: As His Majesty's mistress's husband he is privileged and goes free—so long as he does not take his wife with him.

DELANNOY: But if the King overtake the couple here—as he is like to do—what then?

BRISSAC: For the Prince and Princess—*toujours la politesse*. . . . But for us—the rope.

DELANNOY: Then I'll put another league betwixt me and the King.

BRISSAC: No, no, my friend. You forget your pistol. That is the thing to put between you and the King. At all costs we stay him here until their Highnesses are safe in Flanders.

DELANNOY: How many of us are in this?

BRISSAC: Half a score good fellows with blunt faces and sharp swords.

DELANNOY: D'ye mean to kill the King?

BRISSAC: I mean to earn my pay.

DELANNOY (*meditatively*): I have never yet killed a king.

BRISSAC: 'Tis royal sport. Harry's a stag will toss many a hound ere he go down. I would I were on his side, but pay is pay, and (*jerking his thumb contemptuously towards inn*) even his pay is better than starvation . . . and what's a man to do when there's no war?

[*Enter PRINCE hastily from inn, followed by GILLES waiting on PRINCESS.*]

PRINCE: Morbleu! where are those horses?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

GILLES: They come, my Prince.

[The horses are brought in from yard and harnessed to carosse by stableboys. A small crowd gathers. TELLIER rushes through arch across into house, followed by ALIDA, who does not see GILLES busy with the horses.]

PRINCE (*to PRINCESS*): I have no money. Have you money? What the devil are we to do?

PRINCESS (*to PRINCE*): Leave that to me. (*To GILLES.*) They are beautiful—your horses.

GILLES: There are no better in the province, Madame. I chose them to bring home my bride.

PRINCESS: Your bride? Many must envy her. For my part . . . I know not how to reward your generosity.

GILLES (*abjectly*): If I might but kiss your Highness's foot. . . .

PRINCESS: It is not thus we kiss at Court.

[Ogles him and then turns away.]

GILLES (*following her*): Dare I then kiss your hand?

PRINCESS (*shaking her head*): It is not thus we kiss at Court.

GILLES (*troubled*): How then?

PRINCESS (*having drawn him aside*): Why thus we kiss at Court.

[Kisses him on the lips. Amazed but delighted, he returns the kiss, and they stand a moment so, when ALIDA enters from inn and perceives them.]

ALIDA (*thunderstruck*): Gilles!

PRINCESS (*glancing at her, not at all discomposed*): Ah, the chambermaid. Do you want money, girl?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

ALIDA: I don't want your money.

PRINCESS (*mildly surprised, to GILLES*): What does she want?

GILLES (*half consciously*): Nothing. . .

[*He kisses her once again.*]

PRINCE: The carriage waits. . . . (*Turning, perceives the PRINCESS kiss GILLES, as do all the others.*) What does this mean? Charlotte, this is too much!

PRINCESS (*turning to him smilingly*): A secret you shall hear some day . . . (*leaping into carosse*) . . . perhaps.

PRINCE (*bewildered, as GILLES approaches feels in his pocket*): My purse . . . where is my purse?

GILLES: All is paid, my Prince. All paid. (*Bows him into carosse and shuts door.*) Adieu, most exquisite Princess!

PRINCESS: Adieu? Nay, au revoir!

[*The carosse rolls off, the crowd running after it and GILLES watching from archway.*]

BRISSAC: And now, my friends, to horse!

[*The three cavaliers mount. Enter TELLIER with bill.*]

TELLIER (*to BRISSAC*): 'Tis you, my lord, who pays?

[*The cavaliers laugh.*]

BRISSAC (*waving him away*): The Princess has paid for all. We follow her to Brussels.

TELLIER (*respectfully*): Do you return, my lord?

BRISSAC: If we ever return, you shall know of it.

[*Exeunt cavaliers laughing.*]

TELLIER (*to GILLES*): Is this true? Did the Princess give you the money?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

GILLES (*still entranced*): Money . . . ha!

ALIDA: I'll tell you what she gave him . . . (*clenching her hands*) a kiss.

TELLIER (*not understanding*): How much?

ALIDA: A score . . . and he gave her . . .

TELLIER (*mystified*): The change?

ALIDA: In full measure.

TELLIER: See here, Gilles, where is the money the lady gave you?

GILLES: O exquisite Princess!

[*Exit through archway up the road.*]

TELLIER (*angrily to ALIDA*): You have turned my son's head with your love-making.

ALIDA (*almost in tears*): No poor country girl could do that. 'Tis that scabby Princess. . . . But I'll be even with them both. . . . I'll not be despised by any bottle-washer in Christendy. . . . My father shall know of this. I'll have the law of you all, and if the King himself comes after me he shall have me for better or worse.

[*Exit crying through arch and down road.*]

BOILEAU: Here's a how d'ye do! Here's a mighty coil! (*To TELLIER.*) But it's an ill wind that blows nobody good. . . . Old Taurus. . . . You haven't got the cows yet, have you?

TELLIER (*enraged*): The cows! . . . What's that to you?

[*Threatens to strike him.*]

BOILEAU (*recoiling*): I only asked for old Taurus. . . .

TELLIER: Be off. (*Drives him out.*) A murrain on all petticoats, say I. A murrain on cows. . . . That rob

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

honest innkeepers of their reckonings and all men of their senses. . . . Be off, I tell you, be off. If women wore breeches the world would be the better for it and heaven no worse. (*Driving out the servants.*) Be off, all of you, to your work, and if any more come, let none wait on them or give them bite or sup till I come back.

[*Goes off by gate.*]

BOILEAU (*peeping out of the doorway of the house*): I wonder if the cows have come . . . or if he's gone to fetch them now. . . . I can't help thinking of poor Taurus. . . . No one thinks of poor Taurus but me. . . . I think I'll just go and talk to him. (*Is about to pass across to other side of courtyard when he checks himself and listens.*) Someone coming up the road. . . . Cows? . . . (*Shaking his head.*) No, cows don't talk like that . . . nor do drovers. (*Heaving a sigh.*) Poor Taurus. (*Shaking his head.*) And yet, and yet, all may be for the best. . . . Every cloud has a silver lining.

[*Returns to house. The waning light suggests sunset.*]

ALIDA and her father enter by middle gate.

DURAND: There, there, child, dry your eyes, dry your eyes, and tell your old father what ails you at all.

ALIDA (*through her sobs*): Nothing . . . nothing . . . nothing. Only the Princess has ravished my true love.

DURAND: What Princess, honey?

ALIDA: The slutty princess from Paris . . . and I'm not your honey any more, father. . . . I'm soured . . . soured. . . .

DURAND: What Princess from Paris? Be calm, love daughter. . . . Calm yourself and tell your father all,

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

ALIDA: She that was the King's I don't know what. . . . And has married a prince too good for her. . . . And now she wants to take my own true honey-love was to wed me to-morrow. Oh! dear Mary Virgin, what shall I do?

DURAND: There, there, dear child. . . . If the Princess has done any mischief thoughtlessly, as Court ladies will, she's gone away for ever.

ALIDA: Ay, but my sweetheart's sweet heart's gone with her . . . rolled away down the road to Flanders, leaving my own heart, my own true heart, broken here on the road behind him.

DURAND: You're young, my great sweet daughter, and if hurt's done you, time will mend it.

ALIDA: Time will never mend a broken heart, at least so the song says.

DURAND: Well, well, let us ask Master Tellier what he thinks of this. Court custom wrought him some damage once upon a time; but I doubt his heart's well mended.

[Exit with his daughter to inn. Horse heard outside. Enter hastily on foot the KING and DE BALZAC—BALZAC first, covering the KING with his sword. The KING has the appearance of a comely man in the prime of life.]

BALZAC (*trying to cover the KING*): Beware, sire, how you go. Here may be assassins.

KING (*hotly*): What care I for assassins? This is the post-house, yet I see no coach.

BALZAC: No . . . there is none. They have found horses and gone on to Brussels,

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

KING: We must find horses and pursue.

BALZAC: Sire, we can do nothing till my men catch us up.

KING: By then she will be safe in Flanders.

BALZAC: Better that than Your Majesty in his grave.

KING(*pacing furiously up and down as CONDÉ did before*):
O love, thou impish torturer of kings!
Shall I die underneath the swords of Condé's knaves
Or burst my heart counting the minutes lost?
Young man, pray Heaven you may not come to love.

BALZAC (*heartily*): Any love of mine will ever be at Your Majesty's disposal.

KING (*heartily*): Loyal fellow.

BALZAC: I beseech Your Majesty to be reasonable.

KING: Dost dare to reason with a king in love?

BALZAC: Ay, and dare tell him why he must not love.

KING: Say'st thou I must not. . . . Who dare hinder me?

BALZAC: I would persuade Your Majesty to think. We cannot hope to stay the Princess now. She must be safe at Landrecies at least—and Landrecies is Spanish. . . .

KING: Myself has been at Landrecies ere this, and had my will there.

BALZAC: Time was, Your Majesty, when we had war.

KING: I'll loose another war rather than lose my pleasure.

BALZAC: Sire, you cannot make a war with fifty troopers. The Archdukes . . .

KING: I'd face the Archdukes with my single sword and level Brussels flat as Amsterdam.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

BALZAC: 'Tis not the Archdukes only—there is Spain.

KING: I'll drive all Spain to refuge in the Indies.

BALZAC: If you touch Spain you touch the Kaiser too.

KING: I'll whip him howling through all Germany over the Alps to Rome.

BALZAC: And there's the Pope—and then Your Majesty can do no more.

KING: No more! I'll take Pope Clement's triple crown and break it on his pate if he outstare me.

BALZAC: He'll excommunicate you.

KING: Tut! He dare not go so far.

BALZAC: Wouldst thou uplift Olympus?

KING: If Jupiter would rob me of my love I'd batter down Olympus with my guns and strew the earth with particles of gods.

BALZAC (*incisively*): Your Majesty is mightiest of kings, but there is that even he cannot do . . . make a cracked vessel whole.

KING (*vehemently*): There is nothing in the four walls of the world I cannot do when I'm aflame with love.

BALZAC: Can Love's own god make a cracked vessel whole?

KING (*appalled*): Condé dare not. . . . She is his wife in name.

BALZAC: Sire, Condé's wife is any man's in fact. . . . She is a wanton.

KING (*drawing his sword*): Scoffer, you die for this.

BALZAC (*opening his arms*): Strike, O King!

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

KING (*dropping his sword-point*): 'Tis I am stricken. (*Thrusts his sword back in scabbard.*) Alas, alas! there is no faith in woman. Would I had given her to you and not to Condé!

BALZAC (*flattered, if astonished*): To me, my liege?

KING: Aye, to you. You would not have deserted me in my old age and taken her with you.

BALZAC: Your gracious Majesty is not so old he will not love again.

KING (*indignantly*): Dost take me for a weather-cock? . . . Know, young man, when a king comes to love at fifty-five his flame is constant and with a heat youth cannot guess. (*Desperately.*) If he lose this quarry, Harry shall hunt no more, nor ever know the joy of spring.

BALZAC (*soberly*): Your Majesty turns melancholy, he wants food.

KING (*still fiercely*): The only food for my appetite speeds towards Flanders. Come, horses! horses!

[*He flings himself on to the barrel, takes off his hat and cautiously feels his forehead.*]

BALZAC (*energetically*): Horses my liege shall have, if there be horse in Donnemarie.

KING: My old wound smarts again.

[*His fingers disclose a gleaming line of white skull beneath his hair.*]

BALZAC (*going*): I'll look here in the stableyard.

KING (*springing to his feet suddenly*): Sapristi!

[*His hand covers his forehead.*]

BALZAC (*leaping back to him anxiously*): Dread lord!

KING: That villain's bullet must have torn my hair,

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

BALZAC (*bewildered*): Your hair?

KING: How far is Gaston in the rear?

BALZAC (*shrugging his shoulders*): Your Majesty's valet is no horseman.

KING (*impatiently*): I keep him to tend my scalp, not go ahunting in it.

BALZAC: 'Twere well then to tie him to a fast pack-horse, not let him ride.

KING: Tut! I dare not offend his dignity for the world. He understands me better than any man in France.

BALZAC: They say no man is a hero to his valet, yet I think he loves you well.

KING: I am more than hero to him.

BALZAC: You are his king, his master.

KING: I am more than his master, I am his masterpiece. . . . Go find, horses!

[Exit BALZAC. The KING sits down again, fingering his head as before. Dusk is falling. ALIDA comes out of the inn door carrying a lantern in her hand, and followed by her father, who closes the door behind him. They do not perceive the KING. They go together as far as the gate to road; there DURAND takes the lamp from her and kisses her.]

DURAND: No further, daughter. Get you back into the house, and I promise you Master Gilles will be with you ere the moon is up. Your mother and I will come anon to hear the ending of this lovers' battle.

ALIDA: I'll never forgive him, never, not if you gave me the moon.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

DURAND (*knowingly*): Who knows but this time to-morrow night he may be giving you the moon, and the man in it and all!

KING (*to himself*): There's a dark saying.

ALIDA: Don't leave me, father, I hear someone groan.

DURAND: 'Tis only Taurus the old bull. (*Patting her shoulder.*) Anon. *[Exit.*

[ALIDA watches her father go down the road, then at last reluctantly turns to recross the yard to the inn door. She finds herself intercepted by the KING.]

KING (*holding up her chin*): What do I behold?

ALIDA (*startled but interested*): Gently, sir! Who are you?

KING: I am the man from the moon. . . . And you?

ALIDA: The wretchedest maid on earth.

KING: There's sympathy 'twixt moon and earth. . . .
I was crossed in love.

ALIDA: I'm crossed in love.

[The window is lighted up and a beam from it in some measure illuminates the KING's face.]

KING: More sympathy. (*Sitting down on barrel.*) Come, tell me your troubles!

ALIDA: I was to be married to-morrow.

KING (*nodding his head sympathetically*): Ah, was it come to that?

ALIDA: And now my lover's run away with a Court lady.

KING (*mystified*): Do you mean a courtesan?

ALIDA: She was a princess and they say the King's love.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

KING (*half understanding*): A princess, and the King's love. . . . Monstrous! Your lover was the Prince of Condé?

ALIDA: No! but that's her name. . . . She stole his heart, and he ran after her, and I'll never see him again. And oh! if I could only be revenged! . . . I'd give my maiden honour for revenge.

KING (*leaping up*): You shall be revenged on Condé. I promise that.

ALIDA (*gaping*): You promise what?

KING: You shall be Princess and the King's love.

ALIDA (*shrinking from him*): Who are you to talk like that?

KING (*lifting his hat with his most fascinating grace*): Do you not know me?

ALIDA (*clapping her hands with delight*): Oh, what pretty hair!

KING (*delighted*): D'ye like my hair? Whose is it? Can you guess?

ALIDA (*overwhelmed*): Can it be the King? . . . Your Majesty? . . .

KING: Not Majesty to you—plain Harry.

ALIDA: But my father? . . .

KING: He shall have a peerage or a pension.

ALIDA: My mother? . . .

KING: The wardrobe or the bedchamber.

ALIDA: And my lover? . . .

KING: I am your lover.

ALIDA (*bewildered*): I mean my other lover. . . .

KING: Oh! Condé. He shall have a whipping—or what you will. . . . What is your name?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

ALIDA: My name is Alida. . .

KING: Your name is what?

GILLES (*outside, calling*): Alida! Alida! Alida!

ALIDA: Mercy on us!

[*Swoons in the KING's arms.*]

KING (*pleased yet perplexed*): There, there, sweet maiden, be brave. Be brave as you are lovely, and take your honours as a woman of the world . . . as you are beautiful, be strong.

[*While he is holding and caressing her GILLES comes in at the back.*]

GILLES (*calling softly*): Alida, Alida! (*Suddenly perceiving her in the stranger's arms.*) Villain! That woman is my affianced wife . . . unhand her!

KING: Pish!

GILLES: Unhand her, I say, or I will have your life.

[*Snatching out a dagger and offering to stab him.*]

KING (*passing the girl behind him, where she stands dazed while he airily waves GILLES aside*): I am the King.

GILLES (*astounded*): The King!

[*Stands spellbound while BALZAC enters from house.*]

BALZAC: Sire, night falls; I have found horses and the escort is at hand. . . . Will Your Majesty deign to mount?

KING (*pensively*): Night falls.

BALZAC: The clock is on the stroke of six, a full moon rises. . . . Will Your Majesty deign to mount?

KING (*unabashed and as a matter of course*): No. We lie here to-night.

BALZAC (*seeing ALIDA*): What, the Princess? . . .

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

KING (*checking him*): Tut, tut, tut.

BALZAC (*gleefully*): More princesses. (*Knocking at the inn door with his whip.*) House! House! House! His Majesty the King lies here to-night.

[*A cry within.*

TELLIER (*within*): His Majesty the King!

[*Hubbub.*

GILLES (*trying to catch her hand in despair*): Alida . . . !

ALIDA (*repulsing him*): Keep your place.

[*Enter from inn TELLIER.*

TELLIER: His Majesty the King!

[*Enter from all sides drawers, stableboys, maids, etc., crying, "The King, the King."*

TELLIER: His Majesty the King lies here to-night!

ALL SERVANTS: The King lies here to-night!

[*In the distance is heard a drum beating time for the march of soldiers, which sound gradually swells.*

TELLIER: Fire for the hearth in the great bedchamber!

BOILEAU: Fire for the hearth in the great bedchamber!

LISETTE: Fire for the hearth in the great bedchamber!

KING (*with one arm round ALIDA, patting her*): Fire for the hearth in the King's bedchamber!

ALIDA (*bewildered*): Sire!

[*The tramp of soldiers is now heard close up, and the SERGEANT'S voice, "Left Wheel!"*

SERVANTS: Soldiers!

[*They rush off to the gate as the musketeers are seen at the back.*

KING: (*to ALIDA*) Think you the old King needs no fire?

ACT II

The great bedroom at the inn Au Bonheur du Roy. In the centre stands the bed, the head of which is to the left of the audience. Below it, to the right of audience, a table. In the wall to the right of audience a door, to the left a huge fire-place. At the back a large press. One or two men-servants, one of them BOILEAU, busy sweeping and laying logs in hearth. LISETTE and old MARGOT making bed.

MARGOT: Dearie, dearie, dearie me! All this bustle, and on the eve of a wedding too. . . . Isn't God good to us these times? He makes the country just like Paris.

BOILEAU: D'ye think it good to have the country like Paris?

LISETTE: In Paris I suppose you had a wedding every day?

MARGOT: I never had one at all myself . . . but that hurt no one. (*Laughs.*)

BOILEAU: It makes my blood run cold to hear you talk of your past.

MARGOT: Who said it was past?

BOILEAU (*turning away*): If it isn't it ought to be.

MARGOT (*behind his back to LISETTE*): See here.

[Pushes aside a panel near door disclosing a hiding-place.]

LISETTE (*alarmed*): Holy Mary! What's that?

MARGOT: In Paris we call that the lover's door.

[Shuts it quickly as BOILEAU turns.]

BOILEAU: What's that about a door?

MARGOT (*nudging LISETTE*): Only a woman's secret.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

BOILEAU: I don't see what right a woman has to have a secret.

MARGOT: Then you'll never make a woman see what right you have to have her.

LISETTE: Strange to think Alida Durand will lie in this bed to-morrow night and the King to lie in it to-night.

MARGOT: Would you think it strange if she lay here to-night?

LISETTE: To tell you the truth . . . Would you?

MARGOT (*chuckling*): Truth was always a queer thing to tell.

BOILEAU: To hear you talk one would think it was only women knew the truth.

LISETTE: Perhaps it's only women know the truth about themselves. (*Laughs.*)

MARGOT: And it's only women are never fools enough to tell it.

[*She and LISETTE are laughing half hysterically as TELLIER bursts in officiously.*

TELLIER: What's this laughing? There must be no laughing here. This is the room for my family to die in.

LISETTE: And to be married in.

TELLIER: Marriage is the beginning of death.

MARGOT: It was for your wife.

TELLIER: Silence, woman! I'll not have my wife abused, and she in her grave where she can't hear it. . . . Why is there no fire?

BOILEAU: Master Gilles said there should be no fire.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

TELLIER (*stormily*): Master Gilles is not master here. There must be a fire. I have set it down in the bill. (*As GILLES appears at door.*) Fetch fire . . . come, bustle!

GILLES (*firmly*): The King commands no fire.

TELLIER (*querulously*): The King commands . . . But I have put it down in the bill. . . .

GILLES: His Majesty did not command no fire in the bill, but none in here.

TELLIER (*relieved*): Ah, just so. We light a fire and put it in the bill and then rake it out to please His Majesty. (*Roaring.*) Bring fire!

GILLES (*resolutely*): I say do no such thing.

TELLIER (*still roaring*): Am I master here?

GILLES (*calmly*): No, the King is. Here and everywhere.

TELLIER (*weakening*): True, true. . . . And His Majesty commands no fire. . . . Not even just as it were the evidence that there was one?

GILLES: No, none at all.

TELLIER (*sniffing*): Does he know how damp the room is?

GILLES: You had better tell him.

TELLIER (*shocked*): No, no. If His Majesty says no fire his cold be in his own head. . . . I never knew even a bagman or a strolling player refuse a fire in March.

GILLES: Kings are capricious.

TELLIER (*shaking his head*): No more than youths and maids.

GILLES: When maids are capricious as kings they are maids no longer.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

LISETTE (*nudging him*): I've known pot-boys to be capricious, but they remained pot-boys.

GILLES (*to her*): You wrong me.

TELLIER (*coming between them*): Who gave you leave to speak, wench? . . . There, leave my son alone.

MARGOT (*nudging TELLIER*): Has he left her alone? . . .

TELLIER (*flustered*): What of that? . . . I'm master here. . . . Monarch of all I survey.

MARGOT: Much you see of it.

TELLIER (*to her*): Don't answer me. (*To LISETTE.*) And you leave my son alone.

LISETTE: Oh, I'll leave him alone as the poxy princess did. . . .

TELLIER: Speak respectfully of my guests.

LISETTE: . . . And Durand's double-faced daughter.

TELLIER: Well, well, whatever Durand's daughter may be—and I think naught of her beyond her cows—there is a bed fit for a king, and I would if I might that the King were fit for it. . . . Come, bustle! bustle!

[Drives the servants round and out. Old MARGOT indicates to LISETTE that GILLES wishes to keep her, and goes out at last leaving the two alone.]

GILLES: Stay, Lisette. Thou lovest me, and I would talk with thee.

LISETTE: I don't love anyone that doesn't love me.

GILLES (*sentimentally*): I love more than one that loves not me.

LISETTE: The more fool you. . . .

GILLES: Ay, fool indeed.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

LISETTE (*reproachfully*): And I ready to love you all the time.

GILLES: Your love, Lisette, lacks sentiment or something.

LISETTE: Sentiment, indeed. . . . Do you take me for a Paris huzzy?

GILLES: A Paris anything? . . . No, would you were. . . . But with those hands. . . . Fie! How could I kiss those hands?

LISETTE: I never asked you to kiss them. . . . Decent people don't do those towny tricks; mouths are for kissing, not hands. Hands are for work.

GILLES: Little you know of love.

LISETTE: Whose fault is that, I wonder?

GILLES: I cannot help my sentiments.

LISETTE (*turning up her nose*): Your sentiments! And what has an innkeeper's son . . . ?

GILLES (*with a protesting hand*): An innkeeper's son! (*Shaking his head.*) Tut, tut!

LISETTE: Tut, tut yourself! For all your face and figure I think you're no more than the mockery of a man.

GILLES: You did not call me the mockery of a man when . . .

LISETTE (*opening the door, looking out and closing it again*): When what? (*Making a movement towards him.*) D'ye want me to come in by the lover's door to-morrow night?

GILLES (*upset*): The lover's door? What know you of that? (*As LISETTE mockingly opens and closes panel.*) The

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

lover's door will be the door of hate to-night. (*Bursting into tears.*) Oh, what a mockery is life itself!

LISETTE: What's the matter now?

GILLES (*hysterically*): This morning I was the happiest of lovers and loyalest of my sovereign's subjects. To-night I have set my heart on the slaughter of my betrothed and of my King.

LISETTE: The King. . . . Why the poor King?

GILLES: Would I had killed him to-day ere I knew why . . . Nor fully whom I slew.

LISETTE: That would be like you, to do things you knew not why nor how.

GILLES: Oh, loathly fate to throw my happiness away! . . . What mad humour was it impelled me to draw one moment from my true love? . . .

LISETTE: What, indeed!

GILLES: . . . To cast my heart to a Court wanton dubbed Princess. . . . Had she not given me her dainty damned hand. . . . Words fail me.

LISETTE: Go on! Dainty damned hand is good, but you were lucky to escape her Prince's dainty damned foot.

GILLES (*furiously*): If he had dared raise his foot on me I had plucked him from his gilt *carosse* and strewed the muddy inn-yard with his bones.

LISETTE (*incredulously*): Go on!

GILLES: Mine enemy's the King. . . . 'Twas he that robbed me of my affianced bride.

LISETTE: Are you sure he wants even to borrow her?

GILLES: You torture me.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

LISETTE: Cheer up; anyhow, he won't want the cows!
. . . What good would they be in a palace? . . . More likely he'll give her stuff for a new gown or something handsome.

GILLES: I'll tear it from her shoulders.

LISETTE: She won't mind that . . . even though you're not the King.

GILLES (*clapping his hands to his ears*): The King the King! . . . I'll think only of revenge, and after revenge escape.

LISETTE: There's some sense in that.

GILLES (*opening panel*): Behind this traitor panel shall I hide till the King sleeps, and then the deed done, I'll climb the great chimney and escape.

LISETTE: I don't care what you do as long as you escape.

GILLES (*putting his fingers to his lips*): Soft!

LISETTE (*listening at door*): The guard is coming, you'd better begin to practise escaping now.

GILLES: Alas!

[*He slips behind panel and closes it as the SERGEANT enters with the musketeers, including BOBILOT and CALVIN.*]

SERGEANT: Hallo, kiss-me-quick! Alone in the King's bedroom?

LISETTE (*curtsying*): An't please your honour.

BOBILOT: 'Twould please his honour to be here alone with thee.

CALVIN (*in a dry, solemn voice*): The sergeant's honour but not the maid's,

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

BOBILOT: (*to CALVIN*) I owe thee a ride on the hobby-horse for that, Jock Calvin.

SERGEANT (*addressing himself to LISETTE but winking at BOBILOT*): And what wert doing in the King's room?

LISETTE (*demurely*): Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies. [Exit.

SERGEANT (*as he and BOBILOT search the bed in an elaborate but careless manner*): 'Tis chilly in this room.

CALVIN (*who is conscientiously searching along the walls, thumping them with his pike and fist*): So much the better for the King's hot blood.

SERGEANT (*yawning*): Well, Harry's hot blood near cost him his life to-day.

CALVIN: Ay, and for what? I ask you, for what?

SERGEANT: For what indeed. . . . Go to thou, Jock Calvin, for a wench—what else?

BOBILOT: A fancy giglet, the Princess, eh?

CALVIN: I've no taste in these Court drabs; if I'd a mind to marry, which God forbid, I'd rather ha' the wench he kissed last.

BOBILOT: What? With his kisses hot on her? Jock Calvin, fie!

CALVIN: I think she never felt his kisses hot or cold.

SERGEANT: Look ye here, Jock Calvin. (*Draws the two of them to him confidentially.*) Look ye here, Bobilot. . . . If Harry's the man he was when I first trailed pike behind him, someone will feel his kisses to-night.

CALVIN (*looking about him horrified*): What! Here in this room? . . . And she plighted to the innkeeper's son? . . . To be married to-morrow?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

SERGEANT: Ay, 'tis a lucky lad, the innkeeper's son. God be wi' un, and he'll die a duke while we honest bachelors rot to an end in a lazar house.

CALVIN: But 'tis iniquity you make the King do. . . .

SERGEANT: Then get thy Bible and preach His Majesty to sleep as they say the admiral did before Bartholomew.

CALVIN: Hist! (*Noise outside.*) Someone comes.

BOBILOT: A lordly step, it is the King.

[*The musketeers busy themselves.*]

SERGEANT (*drawing himself up*): Prepare to salute. (*Flings open the door and turns back in disgust.*) 'Tis only pimping Gaston, the King's valet.

[*Enter very pompously GASTON, a plump, solemn man of episcopal port, followed by BOILEAU carrying a valise.*]

GASTON: There, fellow, have a care. Set it down gently by the table. . . . Gently, very gently I charge you. . . . Enough! Begone! (*Exit BOILEAU. GASTON looking round.*) Why is there no fire?

SERGEANT: Ask someone else, master valet. . . . What cat have you in that bag?

GASTON (*with nose in air*): That bag contains the majesty of France.

SERGEANT (*laughing*): Come, master valet, you're not such a wizard as to conjure the King into a bag.

GASTON: What I do for the King is to be held secret between him and me. . . .

SERGEANT (*mimicking him*): And Madame Bubble and the bedpost.

GASTON: That is a vulgar view.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

SERGEANT: If the majesty of France is in that bag, what was in the bundle you carried down the village street an hour ago?

GASTON: An hour ago I was privileged to distribute the King's almesse in Donnemarie.

SERGEANT: Among the King's amours?

BOBILOT (*nudging* CALVIN): The wenches.

SERGEANT: I'd have an answer, master valet.

GASTON (*ignoring him*): It is not becoming that the first gentleman of the King's toilet should converse with a non-commissioned officer of musketeers.

SERGEANT (*furiously*): If I had thee outside I'd toss thee in a blanket.

GASTON: Who tosses me, himself would toss at a rope's end.

SERGEANT (*his wrath growing*): I challenge you to give me satisfaction with the rapier at daybreak ere the King rises.

GASTON: I am an artist and care not to give satisfaction but with my curling-tongs.

SERGEANT: S'death! As I am a soldier I'll make thee swallow thy curling-tongs.

GASTON (*unperturbed*): The King values my curling-tongs above thy whole battalion.

SERGEANT (*taking refuge in pathos*): To be flouted by a minion! It was not thus when I first trailed pike. .

[*Enter* BALZAC.

BALZAC: Is all in readiness for the King's Majesty?

SERGEANT: Ay, my lord.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

BALZAC: The word for the night is Amor Vincit Omnia. [Exit.

SERGEANT: Plague on Latin. . . . What did he say?

CALVIN: Some Roman mumpsimus.

[Re-enter BALZAC, bowing in the KING.

KING (*to the musketeers as they recover arms*): I want no guard to-night. Get you to bed, good fellows.

MUSKETEERS: God bless Your Majesty.

KING: Amen, amen.

[Exeunt musketeers.

[During the following dialogue GASTON opens his valise, spreads white cover on table, left centre, and puts out standing looking-glass, brushes, curling-tongs, etc., and finally a wig-block.

BALZAC: Your Majesty is most incautious.

KING: I ever was. . . . So am I King of France.

BALZAC: Does Your Majesty realise that you're within two hours' gallop of the Spanish frontier?

KING: Ay, and have seen the Spaniards gallop it. Why, this inn is named from a victory I won here when you were in your swaddling-clothes.

BALZAC: A victory in which my father perished.

KING (*surprisedly*): Your father . . .? Ay, to be sure he did.

BALZAC: Strange men have been seen wandering about the fields.

KING (*bored*): How strange and how many?

BALZAC: Men not known in the parish. Armed men. . . . Some say six, some three, some ten. . . . There are three for whom we cannot account.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

KING (*contemptuously*): What are three men to me?

BALZAC (*firmly*): Your Majesty is not the man you were when you came last to Donnemarie.

KING: You think not. . . . Let me tell you this past year I've been as young as ever I was.

BALZAC: Since the constable's minx pierced you with her dart outside the Queen's bedroom.

KING: That wound is tender. . . . Leave it.

BALZAC: It heals to-night, Your Majesty.

KING: That may be. . . . If I am so old (*looking in glass*)—would anyone take me for fifty-five?

BALZAC: No, thanks to Gaston here, a wench might be deceived by candle-light. . . . And undeceived in the dark.

KING (*striking the table*): I am served by the most impudent rogues in France.

BALZAC: And the most long-suffering.

KING: What do you suffer, you?

BALZAC (*kneeling*): The fear to lose my beloved sovereign.

KING (*patting him on head*): Go to, flatterer. Shalt gain an estate by my death. Go to thy bed.

BALZAC: As captain of the King's guard it is my privilege to protect Your Majesty from himself.

KING: Waive your privilege for once. (*Looking at him.*) Reasons of State.

BALZAC: I obey Your Majesty. [Exit.

KING (*to GASTON as he removes his corselet, boots, etc.*): Well, what said she?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

GASTON: Nothing, dread Majesty. . . . But she took the clothes.

KING (*shivering*): Has the fire gone out?

GASTON: It seems it was not lighted, Majesty. Is it your will?

KING: No, it's too late. . . . Gaston, I am weary of high politics. . . . Read me an amorous tale.

GASTON: Please, Your Majesty, the Lady Queen's confessor took all the amorous books out of the armoury.

KING: For her to read to the cardinal?

GASTON: No, dread Majesty, to burn.

KING: Wastrel . . . Philistine. . . . Where did he burn them all?

GASTON: In the kitchen fire, dread Majesty, and ruined the Queen's Majesty's dinner, so they say, the very carbonadoes tasted smuttily of printer's ink.

KING: They had better taste than Her Majesty. . . . Ah, my first Queen, Gaston. She would never have burnt an amorous book.

GASTON: No, my thrice-glorious master, I have heard that her annulled Majesty was in her youth graciously pleased to be most excellently amorous.

KING: And what dost thou hear of her nowadays?

GASTON: Why, they say, your most perfect Majesty, that of late the annulled Queen has turned as honest as any woman in France.

KING (*sighing*): Ay, Gaston, that woman's vanity would lead her to any extreme. . . . And is all my little library extinguished?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

GASTON: Even so, please Your Majesty. . . . Save only the Spanish romance of the sorrowful knight.

KING (*frowning and moving his hand deprecatingly*): Ah, I like not the cynicism of that tale, but if you can pick me out an amorous passage, you may read it. Something about a damsel tending a wounded knight, or a weary knight, or anyhow a knight that would to bed. Is there not something about such a damsel tending such a knight—or is that in “Astraea”?

GASTON: It is in both, Your Majesty. (*Producing from his bag “Don Quixote.”*) Will Your Majesty please this to be the passage? (*Reading on his knees.*) “And having seen all this, can ought be more charming than to behold issuing forth from the castle gate a goodly troop of damsels, whose bravery and gorgeous attire would I describe as the histories do, I were never done. And then she who appears to be the chief of them all, takes by the hand the valiant knight, who threw himself for his lady’s sake into the burning lake, and carries him silently into the rich castle on the bank, and stripping him naked as his mother bore him, bathed him all over with odoriferous essences, and put on him a shirt of the finest lawn, all sweet-scented and perfumed. Then comes another damsel, and throws over his shoulder a mantle, reckoned worth a city or more. What a sight it is then, when after this he is carried to another hall, to behold the table spread in such order that he is struck with suspense and wonder. Then to see him wash his hands in water distilled from amber and sweet-scented flowers: to see him seated in a chair of ivory! To behold the damsels waiting on him in marvellous silence! Then to see such a variety of delicious viands, so savourily dressed! To hear soft music while he

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

is eating, without knowing whence it comes. And when dinner is ended, and the cloth taken away, the knight lolling in his chair, and perhaps picking his teeth, according to custom, enters unexpectedly at the hall door a damsel much more beautiful than any of the former, and seating herself by the knight's side, begins to give him an account what that castle is, and how she is enchanted in it, with sundry other matters which surprised the knight, and raised the admiration of those who read his history. I will enlarge no further here upon . . ."

KING (*with a bellow of disappointment*): Pest on poets! . . . It is ever so, they bring a horse to the water but will not let him drink. Read me no more, go fetch me wine. . . . Nay, give the book here till you return. Dispatch.

GASTON (*bowing himself out*): Gracious Majesty.

[*Exit.*

KING (*reading to himself*): "And when dinner is ended, and the cloth taken away, the knight lolling in his chair, and perhaps picking his teeth, according to custom, enters unexpectedly at the hall door a damsel much more beautiful than any of the former, and seating herself by the knight's side. . . ." (*While he reads the three cavaliers of the PRINCE OF CONDÉ drop silently down the great chimney. One, DELANNOY, crawls unnoticed to the door and bars it. The KING, hearing the click, looks up.*) Ah!

BRISSAC (*creeping up behind the KING*): The damsel's kiss. (*Throws a towel across the KING's face and drags him backward.*) Out swords! . . .

[*As the men fall on the KING, GILLES thrusts back the panel, fells DELANNOY with a blow from behind, and unbars the door.*

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

GILLES (*at the top of his voice*): King's men, rescue!

[*There is a hubbub as the cry is caught up below.*
GILLES, the KING and cavaliers struggle in a knot.
TISSOT has his sword at the KING's throat when
GILLES knifes him. Enter musketeers led by BALZAC
and followed by TELLIER, GASTON, LISETTE,
MARGOT, etc. The cavaliers are seized and pinioned.

KING (*to cavaliers*): To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?

BRISSAC (*panting*): Rot it, Your Majesty! Hang us . . . no badinage. We are murderers, but brave men.

KING: So far as I am concerned you are not murderers. (*Bowing to GILLES.*) Thanks to my young friend on the right. . . . But neither, so far as I have any evidence, are you brave men. How am I to know that you are brave men?

BRISSAC (*between his teeth*): It takes some courage to try to kill a king.

DELLANOY: The bravest King that ever was. . . .

KING: Ah! If you had but said that before you assailed me I might have flung myself contentedly upon your swords.

BRISSAC: You've the right to the rope, sire, but no right to mock.

KING: Come, you're a whimsy fellow for an assassin!

BRISSAC: That's not my trade, I am a soldier.

KING (*indicating TISSOT*): Let this man teach you to keep silence in the ranks.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

TISSOT (*hoarsely*): I am sore wounded. . . . Smother in my blood.

KING: Get him a surgeon. (*Tissot is led out.*) How was he wounded?

GILLES (*still wondering at himself*): I stabbed him as we struggled in the rushes.

KING (*ironically*): Gentle innkeeper, is this your practice with your guests?

TELLIER (*shocked at the suggestion*): This one, dread Majesty, came down the chimney.

KING: Had he come by the door he might have carved me unreprieved.

TELLIER: Oh, your gracious Gracefulness . . . No one was ever carved in my house, nor anyone come to harm in it since my wife died of the plague in that bed.

KING (*looking at bed*): Ah! I shall sleep the better for knowing that. (*Yawns.*) Take the prisoners away, I'll let the sun rise upon my anger.

BRISSAC (*impatiently*): Hang us now, Your Majesty, hang us now.

KING (*smilingly shaking his head*): Anon.

BRISSAC (*pleadingly*): Your Majesty, hang us now.

SERGEANT: Presume not on the King's mercy.

[*Lays hands on him to march him off.*]

LISSETTE (*edging between them*): So you dropped down the chimney?

BRISSAC: Ay, but my kissing days are over.

LISSETTE: And just when I feel I'd almost like one now!

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

BRISSAC: Shalt have it now or any time till hanging time.

SERGEANT (*throwing her aside, very shocked*): And a company of the musketeers waiting to be kissed below! Come away.

[BRISSAC and TISSOT are marched off, followed by LISETTE.]

BALZAC (*to the KING*): Your Majesty sees the danger of lying without a guard.

KING: I see the danger of lying in a room that has not had the chimney cleaned.

BALZAC: But, Your Majesty! . . .

KING (*stopping him*): Enough. See that no more soot falls. [Exit BALZAC.]

TELLIER: If Your Majesty had had a fire . . .

KING: My Majesty had been warmer. . . . Leave us. (*To GILLES, who is following his father.*) Stay you. (*Exeunt all but the KING, GILLES and GASTON. The KING to GASTON.*) Have you the wine?

GASTON: Ay, gracious Majesty.

KING: Two cups. (*To GILLES as the cups are filled.*) Dare you drink your father's wine?

GILLES (*innocently*): If Your Majesty bids me. . . .

KING: For the good of the house, eh? (*To GASTON.*) Leave us. (*Exit GASTON. The KING, alone with GILLES, suddenly drops his buoyant manner and embraces him.*) My saviour, my gallant boy. Thanks to you France has still a king and Henry of France his life.

GILLES (*breaking away from him*): You know not what you say, you know not what you do.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

KING (*surprised and mildly interested*): Hem! You remind me of Sully when you talk like that. Teaching your King his place.

GILLES: Sire, I do not presume. . . .

KING: You presumed to save my life, we'll not stand on etiquette. You have a king beholden to you . . . name your reward.

GILLES: I want nothing from you.

KING: That's easy granted. I would that women thought like you.

GILLES: Your Majesty! . . .

KING: Well?

GILLES: I will tell you the truth.

KING: The truth is a long story and I am pressed for time. Still, I have to thank you for what time I have . . . so tell me your story.

GILLES: I came not here to save you.

KING: You came, that is enough for me.

GILLES: But I came to kill you.

KING: Ha! This is like old times. (*Twirling his moustache pensively*). Think me not captious if I call you changeable. You mind me of my last love. . . . And most of the earlier ones. (*Politely*.) Is there any likelihood of your returning to your first intention?

GILLES: That depends.

KING (*with sweet reasonableness*): Pounds, shillings, pence?

GILLES: I have said I want nothing from you.

KING (*deferentially*): My slip. I apologise. . . . You merely want to take from me my life.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

GILLES: Your Majesty wants to take from me my wife.

KING: The deuce! . . . Now who can that be?

GILLES: The maiden you kissed outside this house this nightfall.

KING: Oh! I recall, there was someone. . . . Yes. She was in distress. I forget why, but as the father of my people I was called upon to console her. . . . You in the dark, taking this act for mere gallantry, complained; in fine, you objected at the time . . . very properly.

GILLES: Your Majesty is just. . . .

KING: Justice becomes a king. . . . When you objected you did not know I was the King.

GILLES: No, sire.

KING: I am not to understand that your objection still holds good?

GILLES: I am Your Majesty's humblest servant. . . . But my wife's my wife.

KING: But this lady is not your wife.

GILLES: She is about to be my wife.

KING: And why not?

GILLES: She cannot be my wife and Your Majesty's.

KING (*sighing*): Well, well. Times are not what they used to be. Better to be a Turkish pasha than the King of France. I have outlived my age.

GILLES: Your Majesty carries his years well.

KING (*brightening*): So they say.

GILLES: Who say, Your Majesty?

KING (*ignoring the question*): What think you of me for a man past fifty?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

GILLES: Did not Your Majesty say it I would cry "incredible." Your Majesty looks a bare forty.

KING (*delighted*): Ha ha! Summa ars celare artem, eh?

GILLES: I am no scholar, sire.

KING (*drinking*): I learnt Latin from the libellous book my first queen wrote of me.

GILLES: Does that queen write libels?

KING: Ay, and drinks like a fish. . . . But there, no backbiting, no backbiting. . . . Scandal's the curse of the age, and not even the King's bed is sacred.

GILLES: Nor the King's subjects.

KING: You're rustic. . . . Still, I owe you my life. . . . You shall have your bride scot-free.

GILLES: Your Majesty will see her no more?

KING (*astonished at his presumption*): You are difficult. I can't refuse to see her if she comes here to-night.

GILLES (*appalled*): If she comes here to-night?

[*Enter GASTON.*

GASTON: Your Majesty, a youth brought this ring and waits without.

KING: In a moment give him entrance. (*Exit GASTON.*) Another of those assassins.

GILLES: Assassins, sire?

KING: Ay, a poisonous fellow. (*Looking round perceives press.*) Prithee withdraw thee into yonder press to be at hand should I want help.

GILLES (*unsuspiciously*): In here, Your Grace?

[*Opens press door,*

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

KING: Ay, surely, and prick your ears so that you fail me not. (*GILLES steps into press, which the KING fastens securely with a cross bar.*) If you cannot hear what we say, tap three times on the door.

GILLES (*in press*): Good, my liege.

KING (*stretching himself on bed, claps his hands three times*): Without there! (*GASTON ushers in ALIDA disguised as a young man.*) Leave us. [*Exit GASTON.*

ALIDA (*going to the KING's bedside, pauses*): I am ashamed that you should see me thus.

KING (*in a low voice*): Your garb becomes you . . . charming.

[*Kisses her on the forehead. There are three knocks.*

ALIDA (*shrinking back*): What is that sound?

KING: You hear my heart beat. (*Louder.*) I was saying that it ill becomes you to seek me thus.

ALIDA (*bewildered*): But it was Your Majesty's pleasure?

KING: And when was it my pleasure to be poisoned?

ALIDA: I come not to poison you.

KING: Ah, so you say.

ALIDA: I came from love and reverence to my liege.

KING: 'Tis well that you should reverence your liege.

ALIDA: I reverence and love him. Did he not to-night . . .

KING (*in a low voice*): Hush! . . . You will wake the sentinels.

ALIDA (*dropping her voice*): But sentinels should be wakeful when they guard their king.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

KING: Sentinels must sleep when he is visited by his loving subjects.

ALIDA: Do all the King's loving subjects visit him like this?

[*Three knocks.*

KING (*loudly*): No, Sir Springald.

ALIDA: 'Tis you will wake the sentinels, my liege.

KING: That is my prerogative. I charge you as you hope for pardon not to do it.

ALIDA: I would do nothing but what Your Majesty shall bid me.

KING: And did I bid thee to come here disguised?

ALIDA: You mock my boldness in donning these weeds. . . . You hold me for unmaidenly.

KING (*very loudly*): No, it were more like a woman than a man to steal with poison to a king's chamber.

ALIDA: Your Majesty is distraught. Oh, Your Grace's grace (*dropping her voice*), oh, my liege, do you not know me for Alida whom you wooed this e'en?

[*Three knocks.*

KING (*loudly and sternly*): I know you not.

ALIDA (*affronted*): Why, then you never shall.

[*Turns to go.*

KING (*piqued*): Stay! (*In a gentle voice.*) I would know thee, Alida, for I love thee well.

ALIDA (*throwing herself on her knees by him*): My King! My heavenly lord! (*Three knocks. She shrinks, appalled.*) What is that sound?

KING (*softly*): It is the still small voice of conscience. . . .

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

ALIDA: But it sounds from out yon press.

KING: Ay, I locked my conscience up when you came here.

ALIDA: And I drowned mine to-day in tears of rage.

[Three knocks.]

KING: I would I had the knowledge to resuscitate it.

ALIDA: Why so, liege love?

KING: That I might pair it with mine in the press.

ALIDA: Oh, mocking lover!

[Three knocks.]

KING (*with an effort at solemnity*): Ay, I am a mocking lover. Knowest not I'm married?

ALIDA: But thy Queen hath wronged thee.

KING (*surprised*): That's news. With whom?

ALIDA: I have forgot the name.

KING: Well, let that pass if you forget the name.

ALIDA (*indignantly*): You can forgive her?

KING: In Christian charity.

ALIDA: I have no Christian charity for my lover Gilles.

[Three knocks.]

KING (*loudly*): Why, as you say, that Gilles is the handsomest, bravest, most perfect man in France.

ALIDA: No, to my mind the handsomest, bravest, most perfect man in France is the King.

KING (*delightedly forgetting himself*): Ha, ha! you tell me that? Then I tell you that the charmingest and most ravishingly beautiful woman in France is . . . (*checking himself*) is the Queen.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

ALIDA (*shocked*): You love the Queen more than me?

KING (*in a low voice*): Present company always excepted.
. . . Tell me more about myself. What is there about a poor old fellow like me to admire?

ALIDA: I find the mouth well, the nose pretty well, the eyes very well, but what I most admire . . .

[*Three knocks.*]

KING (*eagerly*): What . . . what?

ALIDA: Are these sweet curls upon Your Highness's brow.

KING (*troubled*): Oh!

ALIDA: They are like a boy's.

KING (*almost apologetically*): Ah! . . . Once my dear good mother that's gone said to me, "Harry, train your hair to stand up, but not in the fashion of a popinjay, there must be locks falling on either side. I recommend that," said my dear mother, "because it takes my fancy."

ALIDA: And it takes mine. For these alone I would risk all. . . . Just to kiss one curl.

[*She rises and leans over him.*]

KING (*alarmed*): No, no!

ALIDA (*pouting coquettishly*): There can be no harm in this. (*Lifts one of the KING's curls in her hand. Three loud knocks. The KING starts violently and his hair comes off in her hand, disclosing a ridiculous bald pate. She starts back, horrified.*) Holy Virgin, I am ensorcelled!

[*Drops the wig and flees panic-stricken, while GILLES thumps incessantly on the press door, and the KING hastily picks up his wig and jams it all awry on his head. Then at last he opens press door and lets GILLES out.*]

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

GILLES: 'Twas she, 'twas she! What have you done with her?

KING (*grumpily*): I have been undone by her.

GILLES: What? Is she gone?

KING: Ay, gone home.

GILLES: She is not wanton?

KING (*trying to straighten his wig*): Oh, she is horribly virtuous, thy bride. Fire cannot melt nor water drown her constancy.

GILLES: What said she?

KING: A thousand witty inventions, but all on one string, her love for thee.

GILLES: 'Twas for that she came to be private with Your Majesty?

KING: Ay, 'tis a wise lass, a virtuous lass. Would I had married such an one. She came here from loyalty to thee to beg thee a place at Court.

GILLES (*overjoyed*): Then she loves me still!

KING: As she loves Heaven and her King. . . . Piously, piously. . . . What sayest thou now, Sir Benedick?

GILLES (*kissing his hand*): Oh, sire, lay on me thy august commands that I may go through life loving and serving thee.

KING: Go love and serve thy wife, and when thy wedding-bells ring to-morrow thank God for thy lusty youth.

GILLES: I will, Your Majesty. . . . Have I your leave to go?

KING (*quite earnestly*): Let us first lift up our hearts in prayer.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

GILLES (*flinging himself on his knees*): With joy, O King.

[*The KING, who is between him and the door, is also about to kneel when enter GASTON.*]

GASTON (*not perceiving GILLES*): Your Majesty, good news. She has come back.

KING (*snapping his fingers to indicate GILLES*): Tut, tut! . . . Our gracious Queen, is she returned to Paris?

GASTON (*taking his meaning*): Ay, dread Majesty, and sends a message for your ear alone.

KING: My Majesty will hear it. (*To GILLES.*) Go not yet, await without.

GILLES (*rising*): Your Majesty's will be done.

[*Bows and exit.*]

KING (*with terrible severity*): What is this news you have the presumption to call good?

GASTON (*terrified into a most ascetic tone*): I presumed to think that it might edify Your Majesty to know there is another lady waits below.

KING (*thunderously*): What! . . . What other lady? Murrain on your ladies!

GASTON (*piously*): Amen. . . . I thought it my duty to inform Your Grace.

KING: Your duty to me, or her, or Mercury, or what?

GASTON: To all parties, my liege.

KING (*throwing him a purse*): Give her that and my blessing.

GASTON (*tremblingly picking up the purse*): No message, Your Grace?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

GASTON (*placing her in a chair*): The King prays. Sometimes his prayers are long. Be seated, madame.

[*He approaches the KING, screening him from the PRINCESS. The KING waggles his right hand slightly. Exit GASTON with a sanctified air. A long pause. The PRINCESS having surveyed the room for a long time from her chair at last grows impatient and coughs ; as he still takes no notice, she rises and commences to examine the things on the dressing-table, and from there is going to the press when the KING rises rather suddenly and stops her with the words :*

KING (*with majesty*): So you have come back to us.

PRINCESS (*wheeling round to face him*): I have come back, and I should have gone away again if you'd prayed much longer.

KING: Great is the power of prayer.

PRINCESS: What do you mean?

KING: The question is what you mean. . . . Can you offer some explanation of your conduct, your undignified conduct?

PRINCESS: I was coerced.

KING (*shaking his head*): Coercion is for men, not for women, it cannot be done.

PRINCESS: No . . . it failed in my case.

KING: It must always fail. . . . Why did you not turn back before?

PRINCESS: I would see if you were in earnest.

KING: I am always in earnest.

PRINCESS: I did not know that.

KING: Anyone could have told you.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

PRINCESS: The others with whom you were in earnest were before my time.

KING: True, all these things are past and done with.

PRINCESS: Except one.

KING (*stiffly*): Except what one?

PRINCESS: The one you were earnest with in this room to-night.

KING (*taken by surprise*): You . . . you exaggerate.

PRINCESS (*indignantly working up to a scene*): To think that I came back heart-broken, expecting to find you dead.

KING: And in time to cut a figure at my funeral.

PRINCESS: Don't be heartless. . . . Instead of finding your dead body here alone in this room I find . . . two, and alive.

KING (*severely*): You found nothing.

PRINCESS: It was worse than nothing to find you in the arms of another woman.

KING: I am not in the arms of another woman.

PRINCESS: No, but she is in the arms of another man, the handsomest lad I ever saw. . . . Talk of the wickedness of Paris, it's nothing to the country.

KING: It's the fresh air.

PRINCESS: Even the lambs look giddy and unprincipled, and I saw cows in the yard behaving as they never do in town. And as for you . . .

KING (*with great dignity*): As for me, you are mistaken. Here as in Paris I remain a king.

PRINCESS: And what a king! . . . Wretch that I was to care for you. . . . (*As though about to break down.*) Where shall I ever find consolation now?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

KING (*most graciously*): Child, you shall find it in this room.

PRINCESS (*clapping her hands*): With you, my lord?

KING (*suppressing a yawn and shaking his head*): I'm going to bed.

[*Throws a cloak round him and lies down on the floor.*]

PRINCESS (*mildly surprised*): But if to bed, why not to bed, my liege?

KING (*looking at her sleepily through one eye*): Reasons of State.

PRINCESS (*desperately*): You said I'd find consolement in this room.

KING (*looking at her through the other eye*): Ay, prithee look for it. (*Yawns.*)

PRINCESS (*wildly stamping her foot*): Look for it where?

KING (*severely*): Use your intelligence, woman.

[*Lies down and snores. A sneeze is heard from the press.*]

PRINCESS (*startled*): What's that? . . . Consolement or the devil? Lord, defend me, I can but see. (*Steals over to press, candle in her hand, and sees GILLES with a cry of delight.*) Oh, you beautiful boy. God bless His Majesty!

GILLES (*gibbering*): Ah!

PRINCESS: I said God bless His Majesty, why don't you say Amen?

GILLES: Amen, amen. Ah!

PRINCESS: What are you "ah"-ing about? Why don't you come out of that?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

GILLES: His Majesty bade me stay here till he called.

KING (*raising his head*): Gilles!

[*Lies down again and snores.*]

GILLES (*springing forth*): Your Majesty!

[*Looks longingly at the KING who merely snores.*]

PRINCESS: It was for me His Gracious Majesty called you. You will notice that like a soldier-king he takes his rest upon the floor.

[*The KING guffaws and snores.*]

GILLES (*desperately*): Your Majesty, must I . . .

PRINCESS (*approaching him*): Of course you must.

[*She moves nearer to him, and he away round the KING and round the bed until at last he flees in panic and she after him.*]

PRINCESS (*cornering him by the fire-place*): Wast you who kissed me in the yard this afternoon?

GILLES: No, madame, 'twas the devil.

PRINCESS: Then call thy devil once again. I'll raise him. (*Seizes him and kisses him until he melts in her arms.*) See now, the King sleeps; oh, blessed King!

GILLES (*mechanically*): Amen.

PRINCESS (*smiling gleefully*): Amen indeed. (*Turning from him.*) I'll bolt the door and no one shall come in.

GILLES (*reeling and tearing his hair*): The saints forbid. (*As she goes to the door he screams out :*) Alida! Alida! (*and as she bars the door, springs like a wild cat up the chimney.*)

PRINCESS (*turning to see his legs disappear*): My God! how provoking. (*Going to the KING vexedly.*) D'you call that consolement?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

KING (*snores*).

PRINCESS: If I were not so fond of you I'd stab you as you lie. (*The KING snores. The PRINCESS goes over to the door, claps her hands three times and watches to see what happens. Enter BALZAC, who, perceiving the KING to be asleep, beams at her. The PRINCESS says with great dignity :*) Count Henri, I called for you because the King sleeps. It would not become me to remain here with him. Will you . . . ?

BALZAC (*kissing her hand*): Sweet Princess, would you deign . . . ?

PRINCESS: My needs are very modesty itself.

BALZAC (*sentimentally*): How unlike my dreams! (*Bowing her out with great deference.*) Come, lady, come.

[*Exit the PRINCESS with BALZAC.*]

KING (*sitting up*): Twenty-four hours ago I should have been vexed with Henri. (*Rises.*) I'm not now. (*Pulls off his wig and scratches his head.*) Like father, like son. (*Lies down on the bed.*) Time was I had been vexed. (*Stretches out his arms and yawns.*) Not now, not now. (*Yawns again.*) Not now, not . . . (*snores*) now. (*Snores.*)

[*Enter very softly GASTON, who picks up the wig, places it on block, and is solemnly combing it as the curtain falls.*]

ACT III

ACT III

On the roadway outside the inn. Green fields with a mill in the distance and a mound crowned by a wooden cross. On the left the exterior wall of the inn courtyard with archway, the road passes around this. A brilliant spring morning between seven and eight. Musketeers in bivouac on the field, one standing sentinel at the archway, another walking up and down behind, the others lying on blankets eating their breakfast and smoking, most of them singing.

SOLDIERS (*singing*):

King Harry would go to the wars,
And 'spite his love's tears did forsake her:
When he came from the wars full of scars
He found she had married the baker.

King Harry wooed more than one wife.
At courting King Harry was clever,
And every year of his life
He wanted a wife more than ever.

King Harry is broken and grey
Full seventy is he and seven,
And soon he'll be passing away
To play the old Harry in heaven.

CALVIN: I know a king that will never enter heaven
if he cannot have done with women.

SERGEANT: I know a musketeer that will enter clink if
he can't keep a civil tongue in his head.

CALVIN (*stubbornly*): I do my duty, Sergeant.

SERGEANT: As well as any man, Jock Calvin, but I
think the King never asked you to do his duty too.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

CALVIN: I am a loyal subject, troubled only for the King's soul.

SERGEANT: Plague take the King's soul! All you're paid to trouble about is the King's body.

CALVIN: What availeth it if we save the King's body only to let him lose his soul?

SERGEANT (*with growing exasperation*): If the King of France cannot call his soul his own, what man is to call his soul his own?

CALVIN (*stiff-neckedly*): No man. Your soul, master sergeant, and the King's and mine are all God's.

SERGEANT (*jumping up*): Insolent dog! To name your soul in one breath with mine and the King's.

CALVIN: We are all equals in the sight of Heaven.

SERGEANT (*peremptorily*): Toss Jock Calvin in a blanket.

SOLDIERS (*delighted*): Toss Jock Calvin in a blanket!

[*Tumult. JOCK CALVIN is thrown into blanket, and they are about to toss him when enter the PRINCESS attended by BALZAC through archway. The soldiers hold their hands and stand to attention.*]

PRINCESS: Dear count, I thank you for your friendliness and so I go to seek my prince again.

BALZAC: Farewell, most gracious lady, and great joy await you. . . . Give my duty to the Prince.

PRINCESS: My duty's with the Prince, my joy I leave behind with you.

BALZAC: Mine rides away with you.

PRINCESS: Some day they'll meet again.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

BALZAC: Leave well alone. . . . Wait here till I find horses. . . . You know why.

PRINCESS (*archly*): Do I?

[*Exit BALZAC.*

SERGEANT (*having made sure that BALZAC is gone*): Now toss him quick.

[*The PRINCESS stopping them as they are about to lift.*

PRINCESS: Whom are you going to toss?

SERGEANT (*saluting*): A scandalous fellow unworthy Your Highness's notice.

PRINCESS: What has he done?

SERGEANT (*making great eyes at her*): Done, Your Highness? . . . It were not fit for me to say.

PRINCESS (*coolly*): Oh . . . that.

SERGEANT (*with great respectability*): Even so, Your Highness.

PRINCESS: It's no use tossing him in a blanket for that. . . . I'll lecture him.

SERGEANT (*wheeling about to his men*): The punishment of the prisoner is altered from blanketing to severe reprimand. Prisoner, 'shun! Advance three paces and kiss the lady's feet.

PRINCESS (*as CALVIN hesitates*): I remit the kissing of my feet.

SERGEANT (*annoyed*): Do it your own way.

PRINCESS (*drawing CALVIN apart from the other soldiers*): Your name is . . . I forget your name.

CALVIN (*sternly*): I'm thinking you never knew it to forget.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

PRINCESS: Well, I'm going to know it now. . . . You'd better tell me. (*With a change of tone.*) Unless you'd prefer me to ask the sergeant.

CALVIN (*as though he were parting with something valuable*): My name is Calvin, John Calvin.

PRINCESS (*interested*): Oh! . . . Not *the* John Calvin?

CALVIN: I am the John Calvin.

PRINCESS: Not Mr. Calvin of Geneva?

CALVIN (*with scowling contempt for her ignorance*): He's dead this long time.

PRINCESS: Oh! . . . Then he's sorry by now.

CALVIN: Sorry for what?

PRINCESS: For leading such a wicked life.

CALVIN (*warmly*): I'll have ye know John Calvin lived no wicked life . . . the Reverend John Calvin.

PRINCESS: You looked very nice as you said that.

CALVIN: Said what?

PRINCESS: Handsome John Calvin.

CALVIN: I never said that.

PRINCESS: You make me forget myself.

CALVIN: That's what my poor father said to my mother when . . .

PRINCESS: When what?

CALVIN: She sought to make him fall from grace.

PRINCESS: Did she succeed?

CALVIN (*with his hand upon his breast*): Behold the sign.

PRINCESS: What sign, where?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

CALVIN (*solemnly*): Me. (*More hopefully.*) But it's an ill wind that blows nobody good, for I'll have you know that in me you behold one of the elect.

PRINCESS (*clasping her hands*): Now I understand what attracted me.

CALVIN (*severely*): I warn you now . . . Princess or no Princess . . . King's love or no King's love . . .

PRINCESS (*reproachfully*): What do you mean by King's love?

CALVIN: I mean what I say.

PRINCESS: Why don't you say "My love"?

CALVIN: D'ye think I'm no more than a pretty toy for you to play with and tire of and break and throw away?

SERGEANT (*sotto voce to his fellows*): Looks as if the lady would like to share Jock's blanket.

[*Suppressed mirth.*]

PRINCESS (*to CALVIN*): Some people think me pretty, but I suppose you've been spoiled by beautiful women. . . . You guardsmen are all like that.

CALVIN (*chastely*): I'm not like other guardsmen. . . . If I believed in saints I'd say I was one.

PRINCESS: I adore saints. You can say anything you like to me, I don't mind how holy it is.

CALVIN (*letting himself go*): Madame! You are beautiful as the scarlet beast of Revelation. . . . And I feel for you even as King Solomon for Her Majesty of Sheba. . . . I have that in my entrails as I stand here before you which passeth show. . . . But if thou thinkest that for a thousand thousand queens a thousand thousand times more beautiful than thee I would sacrifice my hope of

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

heaven hereafter and risk as well a day's pay, I can only say . . . what I could not say without breaking the Ten Commandments. . . . So be off now or I'll tell the King you offered to seduce me.

PRINCESS (*enraged*): I seduce you? I who have kept myself unblemished from the King himself. . . . Oh, you deserve to be tossed in a blanket, a wet blanket. Sergeant, take this man and toss him up on his heavenly throne. [Exit.

SERGEANT: Toss up Jock Calvin on his heavenly throne!

SOLDIERS: Toss up Jock Calvin on his heavenly throne!

(CALVIN is seized, flung into the blanket and tossed once, when enter through the archway the KING, extremely debonair and looking younger than ever. He is followed by BALZAC and one or two officers, TELLIER, etc.

KING: What have we here?

SERGEANT (*facing it out*): Please, Your Majesty, a most disloyal traitor, one Jock Calvin.

KING (*surprised*): Jock Calvin? What has he done?

SERGEANT: He said, dread Majesty, that women would keep you out of heaven.

KING: Give me a halberd. (*The SERGEANT gives him his halberd.*) Hither, Jock Calvin. (*CALVIN, terrified but obedient, approaches the KING.*) 'Shun, Jock Calvin! (*CALVIN stands to attention.*) Hold out thy right hand, Jock Calvin. (*CALVIN holds out his right hand. KING gives him the halberd.*) I promote thee corporal, Jock Calvin, for I see thou knowest where lie the King's enemies.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

CALVIN (*overcome*): Gracious Majesty . . .

KING (*silencing him*): Right-about turn, Jock Calvin, march. (CALVIN *marches off to his fellows.*) And now, where are my other traitors?

BALZAC: One, my liege, he that was wounded by the innkeeper's son, is dead.

KING (*uncovering*): May he rest in peace.

ALL (*likewise uncovering*): Amen.

KING: Had he a priest?

SERGEANT: Ay, Your Majesty, and confessed all to him but naught to us lest he should hang his comrades.

KING: Dead on the field of honour. Bring me the pair. (*Exit SERGEANT and file. Joy-bells ring.*) What bells are these?

TELLIER: Please, Your Majesty, my son is being married yonder in the church.

KING: Why are you not there to give him away?

TELLIER: Please, Your Majesty, I was married in that church myself. . . .

KING: Ah, I take you. Birds of a feather you and I, unlucky in love, lucky at play.

TELLIER: Please, Your Majesty, I never play. I am a serious man.

KING: Ha! . . . Your wife ran away? . . .

TELLIER: No, sire, she died.

KING: Ah well. Anyhow, she escaped.

[*Enter SERGEANT with BRISSAC and DELLANOY, prisoners.*]

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

SERGEANT: Hold up your heads while the King speaks, they'll hang limp enough soon.

KING (*to prisoners*): Well, my chimney boys! What have you to say?

BRISSAC: I guess Tissot has blabbed.

KING: De mortuis, my friend, de mortuis.

BRISSAC (*out of countenance*): Oh, he's dead is he? I beg his pardon.

KING (*politely*): You can do that presently.

BRISSAC (*glumly*): I am not afraid to die.

KING (*to DELLANOY*): And you?

DELLANOY: I hope I can play the man, but I would Your Majesty had hanged us overnight when our blood was hot.

KING: I'll send thee where thy blood shall be reheated, thou salamander.

BRISSAC (*defiantly*): Send us where you will, but have done prating.

SERGEANT: Insolent hog!

[*Offers to strike him.*]

KING: Hold thy hand, sergeant. That is no way to win souls to the King's love.

BRISSAC: I am no woman that the King should love me.

KING: Thou art a Frenchman and the King of France loves nothing better.

BRISSAC: Why then would Your Majesty hang us?

KING: To save you from a worse fate, the rack and the iron crown. . . . And you, why would you slay your King?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

BRISSAC: To save him from a worse fate, a young mistress.

KING (*nodding gravely*): Ay. . . . Oh that so wise a philosopher should draw sword on his master!

BRISSAC: I'm not Your Majesty's man, I am the Prince of Condé's.

KING: The Prince of Condé's self is my man . . . or would be if he were a man.

BRISSAC: Whatever he be I take his pay . . . or would if he did pay, and so must swing for it.

KING: The King hath more forgiveness than thou hast pay.

BRISSAC (*grimly*): That well may be. (*Setting his teeth.*) I ask no mercy, only short shrift.

KING (*to DELLANOY*): And thou?

DELLANOY: I could have died gaily overnight. (*Dropping on his knees.*) I crave the King's mercy.

KING: It is granted. Release him. (*When he is unbound.*) Go thy ways. (*Looking at him closely.*) And ere thou shoot at me a second time mend thy pistol first.

DELLANOY (*hanging his head*): Dread Majesty.

BRISSAC (*contemptuously calling after him as he goes*): Weakling!

[*Exit DELLANOY down the road.*]

KING (*to BRISSAC*): Thou rejectest the King's pardon?

BRISSAC (*sullenly*): I do not, but I will not sue for it.

KING: The King is not so rich that he can afford to give anything for nothing. (*To SERGEANT.*) Take him away.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

SERGEANT: To hang, Your Majesty?

KING: No. . . . To reflect upon the art of government. Let the priest read him a chapter from Machiavel.

BRISSAC (*presuming this to be the name of a Calvinist divine*): I am not of the religion, Your Majesty.

KING: Oh, we are all of Machiavel's religion! . . . Huguenot, Catholic, Turk and Jew, there's a chapter for each of us. Go.

[Exit BRISSAC guarded to inn through archway. Silence falls while the KING wanders apart, staring about him as though reviving dead memories. His officers watch him, talking in murmurs. A lark is heard singing. Suddenly the KING's head drops and his shoulders heave.]

BALZAC (*running to him*): Ails my liege?

KING (*putting his hand on BALZAC's shoulder and pointing towards the mill*):

'Tis my old battlefield . . .

Here flew my banner thirty years ago

When I was poor, plain Henry of Navarre

And all the world was leagued to war me down

Save England and the Dutch.

BALZAC: My father then . . .

KING: Thy father then was what he is not now . . .

Oh, my old captains, whither are you sped?

BALZAC: I trow, sire, worthy captains serve you now?

KING (*pointing to cross-crowned mound*):

Dear lad, I love thee well, but better men

Than thou or I are rotting 'neath our feet:

Yonder sleep forty gentlemen of France

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

Each worth a Harry yet they died for him.
I still can hear their cry of Saint Denis!
As they rode home and won the day for me
And heaven for themselves. Ay, heaven's gate
Must have been thronged with glorious Frenchmen
then
And Peter's eyes dazzled with blazonings
Of noblemen who fell upon the field.
But when I turn my toes up in my bed
And crawl through heaven's gate upon my knees—
If happily I am allowed so far—
Scarcely shall my dead legions know their King
In this old flabby corse disused from war.

BALZAC (*soothingly*):

Take heart, Your Majesty, war is a thing
For ever ready to a King's command.

KING: Ay, and will come sans calling.

(*Rooting in earth with his cane discloses bone.*)

What if it were my skull lay mouldering there?
And not some poor man's fallen in my cause?

BALZAC (*examining it*): I take it for a woman's skull,
my liege.

KING (*looking at it curiously*):

Wash it and see they give it worthier burial . . .

(*He lays his hand on BALZAC's shoulder.*)

There was a woman once in Donnemarie
That loved me.

BALZAC: But one, my lord? Not many!

KING (*shaking his head with a smile*): Do as I bid you.
[*Exit BALZAC with skull to inn. Joy-bells ring.*]

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

Enter from direction of church bridal party. GILLES, ALIDA, DURAND, MME. DURAND, LISETTE, MARGOT, BOILEAU, etc.

ALL (*as they approach*): Long live the King!

KING: Long live the bride and bridegroom!

ALL: Long live the bride and bridegroom and long live the King!

KING: I salute the bride.

[*Kisses her.*]

ALIDA (*in a low, bitter voice*): Are you the King of France or King of Hell?

KING (*courteously*): So far of France. . . : And here (*turning to GILLES*) is my worthiest subject, one to whom I owe my life and, as becomes a king, would give my all, though it tear my heart out.

ALIDA: The King gives and takes away.

KING: You will not find it so. . . . Have you a boon to crave?

ALL: The King gives Alida a boon to crave!

ALIDA: I? No, Your Majesty. What could a poor woman hope for from the King?

KING (*sighing*): What, indeed, but to be remembered in his prayers? (*To GILLES.*) And you, sir, you ask no boon?

ALL: The King will grant Gilles a boon!

DURAND (*pushing forward to GILLES*): My son-in-law.

[*Whispers in his ear.*]

GILLES (*nodding obedience*): Dread Majesty, I have a boon to crave.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

KING (*with dreadful majesty*): Say on.

[*All prick their ears.*]

GILLES: That my eldest born may bear the King's name.

KING (*startled*): Ha! (*Thoughtfully.*) May it not be a girl?

TELLIER (*breaking in*): Your Majesty's pardon, but it may be nothing.

DURAND: Shame, neighbour Tellier! Such speeches bring bad luck.

KING: Compromise, compromise. It may be a boy—it may be nothing. . . . Let us say it is a girl. What would you call it if it were a girl?

GILLES (*submissively*): What Your Majesty pleases.

ALL: What His Majesty pleases, that would be a good name. His Majesty would please a good name.

KING (*pensively*): Charlotte's a pretty name. . . . What do you think of that?

GILLES (*incontinently*): I think it's the name of the Princess of Condé.

KING (*biting his tongue*): Oh, ay. (*Sharply.*) Can't you think of a name yourself?

GILLES (*frightened into mentioning the first he can think of*): Lisette.

LISETTE: That's my name.

KING (*looking at her with interest*): Yours? Charming! Why, call the child Lisette.

ALIDA (*indignantly*): I'm yet a maid.

KING (*recovering himself*): True! . . .

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

ALL: The King says it's true!

KING: We had forgotten we were in the country. We shall remember that. . . . A maid. (*Slaps his thigh.*) Ha, ha, ha! I have it.

ALL: The King has it! What can it be?

KING (*to ALIDA*): Fair mistress, I have a wedding present for you—a man's life.

ALL: A man's life! There's a wedding present. A man's life!

KING: Ay, bring forth the prisoner.

[SERGEANT *marches in* BRISSAC *once again.*

KING (*to BRISSAC*): Fellow, thou art a would-be regicide.

ALL: The fellow is a would-be regicide! (*Indignation.*)

BRISSAC: I am.

ALL: He says he is a would-be regicide. (*Increased indignation.*)

KING (*to ALIDA*): And thou a maiden bride.

ALL: She is a maiden bride. (*Approval.*)

ALIDA: I am.

ALL: She says she is a maiden bride. (*Increased approval.*)

KING: Now old tradition tells that if a bride,
That's still a maid, deigns but to link her lips
A single moment with the lips of one—
Though he be the worst criminal unchanged—
Straightway he gains his innocence again
And further all proclivity towards crime
Abandons him for ever. . . . So if you
A maiden bride but kiss this guilty wretch
You save his life and no less save his soul.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

ALL (*with excitement*):

If maiden bride but kiss this guilty wretch
She'll save his soul and what is more his life.

BRISSAC: Stuff. Who would believe such an old wife's tale as that?

KING (*gravely*): I believe it. Ay more, I know that a maiden's kiss is a sovereign remedy for every evil.

BRISSAC: It may be a remedy for sovereigns, but not for a gallow's bird like me. . . . Would you have me go to judgment with her kiss on me?

KING: No, I would have you go free if she will kiss you. (*To ALIDA.*) Mistress, will you kiss this poor man in charity?

ALIDA: He has a saucy face, I will not play the trollop.

KING: Even to save a soul?

ALIDA: He says himself his soul would be no better for it.

KING: Then, to save his life.

ALIDA (*facing him*): What life but my husband's matters to me?

KING (*pleading*): To save your King from hanging his subject?

ALIDA: Why should Your Majesty trouble about stringing a rogue to a tree?

KING (*still pleading*): I would not hurt a poor tree by hanging a man on it in spring when the sap is rising.

ALIDA: In Picardy we do not so worship the trees that we fear to hang rogues.

KING (*bored*): Well, then let your husband hang him.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

GILLES (*very troubled*): I have foredone one man for Your Majesty.

KING: Why not another?

GILLES: To-day I would rather give my King subjects than take them from him.

ALIDA (*stamping her foot*): Hush!

KING (*to her*): You would not do as much for me?

ALIDA (*eyeing him stubbornly*): Your Majesty knows how much and how little I would do for him.

KING (*to GILLES*): Did I not tell thee she was a horribly virtuous woman? Mayhap thou canst move her to charity, that cannot I.

GILLES:

Come, Alida

To save a poor man's life and please the King

Even I thy husband on our wedding-day

Could not be jealous of a simple kiss.

ALIDA: To save a man's life I would not so much
As kiss a hair on's head.

MADAME DURAND (*disturbed*): What sayest thou, daughter?

ALIDA: I say all men are false, both kerns and kings.

KING (*shaking his head*): No, no.

DURAND: Husbands are seldom false.

KING (*laying down the law*): In France husbands are never false.

ALL (*enthusiastically*): In France husbands are never false.

TELLIER: 'Tis only wives.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

KING (*judicially*): Though not a bride you are a chambermaid,

Whom our poor friend here, we perchance must hang,

Will make a bride if we but give him time.

BRISSAC: I'll wed the village if you give me time.

KING (*reprovingly*): This is no moment for licentious speech.

BRISSAC: None would I wed without Your Highness's wish.

LISETTE: If he weds me I'll see it goes no further.

KING: Judicious maid, judicious chambermaid,
Now justice trembles on the brink of mercy;
For if a chambermaid's a maid indeed
By virtue of her office. . . . And why not?
(*Absentmindedly scratching his head under his wig.*)

Ye gods, resolve me! Send a messenger
To say what makes a maid . . . I cannot tell.

BRISSAC (*exasperated*): Your Majesty, am I to hang or marry?

KING: What if I toss you for it?

BRISSAC (*joyfully*): Gladly, great King!

KING (*tossing*): Cry you.

BRISSAC: Cry for me, King.

KING: Heads! (*Looks at the fallen coin.*) Alas! Would I had said tails, for tails it is. You hang.

BRISSAC (*saluting*): I thank Your Majesty.

[*As the SERGEANT is about to march BRISSAC off, enter BALZAC hastily.*]

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

BALZAC (*handing the KING a paper*): From Flanders, sire.

KING (*opening the letter, calls to the SERGEANT*): Halt! (*Quickly cons through the letter and points to BRISSAC.*) Release him.

BRISSAC (*overcome*): Your Majesty!

[*He is unpinioned.*]

KING (*to BRISSAC*): Your Condé's safe in Brussels
And, being safe in Brussels, threatens France
With a new league 'twixt Germany and Spain—
You're free to join him.

BRISSAC (*furiously*): If Condé threatens France I'll cut his throat.

KING: Condé's more careful of his throat than I—
You will not have the chance.

BRISSAC: Am I free to go?

KING: Free to go or stay.

BRISSAC: If I am free I'll stay to serve my King,
If he will trust me.

KING (*off-hand to SERGEANT*): Enlist him.

BRISSAC (*saluting*): I'll thank Your Majesty when Condé comes.

[*Exit with SERGEANT.*]

KING: There's a recruit worth two. . . . And now, what of the wedding feast?

TELLIER: 'Tis growing cold while Your Majesty's been talking.

KING: If I talk to you I'll make you hot.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

TELLIER (*terrified*): Your Majesty's pardon. . . . I could listen to Your Majesty for ever. Go on, Your Majesty, talk away.

KING (*to GILLES*): If this man is your father, teach him manners.

GILLES: If he were, sire, I would.

KING: Well answered, pot-boy. . . . Go to your breakfast and when I've taken a turn across the fields, by your leave I'll join you to drink the health of the bride.

ALL: Welcome, Your Majesty!

[They drift off through archway.]

GILLES: I'll see that all's prepared. *[Exit.]*

MADAME DURAND: Come, daughter. *[Exit.]*

ALIDA: Gilles is so slow. (*She moves to follow her mother but lingers behind the others, and when all but one or two soldiers are gone, approaches the KING, who is looking out over the field.*) Your Majesty!

KING (*turning sharply*): The bride. (*Calls.*) Corporal Calvin!

CALVIN (*hurrying up*): Sire.

KING: Remain at hand.

CALVIN: Gladly, sire.

[Stands at his elbow.]

KING (*testily*): No, not so near. Yonder, yonder, and keep an eye along the road towards Flanders. (CALVIN *takes up his position where the road sweeps round the building. To ALIDA, very haughtily.*) You desire audience?

ALIDA (*to the KING*): I was a fool last night.

KING (*dropping his grand manner*): And so was I.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

ALIDA: I am a worse fool to-day.

KING: That am not I, but a day older and wiser.

ALIDA: What is the use of being old and wise?

KING: What is the use of being young and foolish?

ALIDA: My mother says I am wise for one so young.

KING: Stick to it. Cherish wisdom. So shalt thou be a good wife and a good mother and a good subject, loving thy King well. . . . As well as is good for either him or you.

ALIDA: 'Tis too late.

KING (*ruefully*): Must I take off my wig again?

ALIDA (*going close to him*): Take it off, it will be all the same to me. I dare see you as you are.

KING: You are more courageous than I.

ALIDA (*puzzled*): More courageous?

KING: I dare not see myself as I am.

ALIDA: That is your modesty.

KING (*delighted*): My modesty?

ALIDA: A king need never be ashamed of anything.

KING: Even a bald head?

ALIDA: I would not wear a wig were I a king.

KING: But I promised my mother always to wear my hair like that.

ALIDA: So there are some promises you keep, even to a woman?

KING (*nobly*): You touch my honour. I have never broken faith with any woman.

ALIDA: You dare to look me in the face?

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

KING: I am as brave as that.

ALIDA (*putting out her arms to him*): All's well that ends well.

KING (*on the point of succumbing*): The saints defend us!

CALVIN (*turning round and crying out*): My liege, I see something!

[*Runs up excitedly.*]

KING (*unnerved, cutting him short*): Corporal Calvin, go tell thy captain to make thee a sergeant.

CALVIN (*forgetting all else in his joy*): Oh, thank Your Majesty!

[*Runs off helter-skelter.*]

KING (*desperately*): I must to Paris and at once.

ALIDA: I can ride. . . . I need no coach like your Princess of Condé.

KING (*at his last gasp*): But, child, remember . . . your father.

ALIDA: He shall have a peerage or a pension.

KING: Your mother. . . .

ALIDA: The wardrobe or the bedchamber.

KING: Your husband. . . . He's saved my life, I cannot have him whipped.

ALIDA: No, I will not ask you that.

KING: Ah, you love him . . . you love him.

ALIDA: Since yesterday I can remember nothing. . . . I may love Gilles, but I adore my King.

[*She throws herself at his feet, and he is stooping over her when they are startled by the voice of MADAME DURAND, who appears in the archway.*]

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

MADAME DURAND (*in a quiet, authoritative tone*):
Alida. (*She advances to the KING so that their eyes meet.*)
I crave Your Majesty's pardon, but may not my daughter
join her husband at the wedding feast? She is waited for.

KING (*recovering himself*): A thousand times yes. What
is a wedding feast without the bride?

ALIDA: 'Tis not so poor as marriage without love.

KING (*piously*): Thank Heaven, we've no such marriage
in France. (*Coaxing to ALIDA.*) Go in, go in.

ALIDA (*pertinaciously*): Your Majesty will join us?

MADAME DURAND: Do not presume to ask the King
his will . . . go in.

ALIDA (*rebelliously*): I am a married woman.

MADAME DURAND (*firmly*): Remember that.

[*Exit ALIDA slowly and reluctantly.*]

KING (*deferentially to MADAME DURAND*): You re-
mind me of my mother. . . . She was masterful like
that. . . . You've a strong hand.

MADAME DURAND: Your Majesty said once 'twas
gentle too.

KING (*pricking up his ears*): I said . . . ?

MADAME DURAND: You said I had a gentle hand.

KING (*looks around him wonderingly*):

A gentle hand. . . . True, many years ago
We fought the Spaniards here at Donnemarie.
How many years, can you remember that?

MADAME DURAND: After you beat the Spaniards down
below

In Mountjoy's fields you lay at father's farm

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

That night . . . the next night still you lay. . . .
You had a sword-cut straight across your brow
Hid in your hair. . . . I washed and tended it—
How your hair reeked of powder smoke, my
King—

And 'cause your head ached with the dint of war
I combed and washed and fondled it and then . . .
And then you called me gentle-handed Joan.

KING (*staring at her*): Gentle-handed Joan . . . !

MADAME DURAND: You called me so, and then . . .
When you were well you rose and rode away. . . .
You have forgotten.

KING: No, I remember now. . . .
Well I remember gentle-handed Joan. . . .
I rose and rode away 'tis true, 'tis true,
I was a poor king then and had no court
To take a woman to. . . . And that was why
I rose and rode away.

MADAME DURAND: And so was best,
I have been happier here at Donnemarie
A poor man's wife than the King's love at court.

KING (*sentimentally, with a vague effort to reconstruct the past*):

It was not best for me. . . . Would that I too
Had stayed at Donnemarie! . . . How many
years . . .

How many years. . . . Your daughter is not . . .

MADAME DURAND (*smiling*): Nay,
My liege, I've known but one man in my life,
His name is Michel Durand.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

KING: Lucky dog!

MADAME DURAND (*sternly*):

But she's my daughter. Even to please the King
I will it not that harm should come to her.

KING (*with real tenderness*):

Sorrow shall never fall through fault of mine
On gentle-handed Joan.
[*Kisses her hand.*]

MADAME DURAND (*wistfully*):

Your Majesty has rolled back thirty years.
How can I wonder at my daughter's folly?

KING: You think her foolish . . .? Can she love this
boor?

We'll call her husband?

MADAME DURAND (*somewhat grimly*):

I know she loved him fully yesterday,
And may bring up a family and die
Ere the King come again to Donnemarie.

KING (*subdued*): 'Tis well. I'll back to Paris where
there's one

Hath rod in pickle for his truant prince—
Stern Sully . . .

[*Enter BALZAC excitedly followed by trumpeter.*]

BALZAC: Your Majesty!

France is invaded, Spinola has crossed
The Meuse with twenty thousand Spaniards.

KING (*straightening himself and taking a deep breath*):
War!

BALZAC: Their foremost squadrons are within a march
And France lies naked to the enemy.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

KING (*ecstatically*): Not so! Sweet France lies covered
by her King,
And he who loves her can protect her too.

(*To trumpeter.*) Sound the assembly.

[*The trumpeter blows the assembly, which is caught up by other trumpets and echoes away in the distance.*]

BALZAC: Shall we fall back on Amiens?

KING: No, no, no!
Call Amiens garrison to join us here.
No Spaniard shall set foot in Donnemarie
While Harry lives. (*Troops begin to fall in at back.*)
Ring the alarm bell, rouse the country-side.
Muster the levies. Muskets and pikes shall be
Enforced by bill-hooks and the forks and scythes.
France is in danger, send the summons free.
Our rallying word, "Harry and Saint Denis!"
[*The alarm bell rings. Enter marching to a trumpet*
JOCK CALVIN *as sergeant with his platoon of mus-*
keteers.]

CALVIN: Halt! Right form! Dress! Number two
advance two paces!

[*Number two obeys. He wears a musketeer coatee and head-dress coming down over his eyes, but is not otherwise in uniform.*]

KING (*scrutinising him*): Ha! I seem to know that face.

BRISSAC (*who is the second musketeer, saluting*): Your Majesty, I am not double-faced.

CALVIN (*apologetically*): Your Majesty's new brand
snatched from the burning.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

KING (*nodding*): Little chimney boy, dost like my service?

BRISSAC: In that it is Your Majesty's, ay! . . . But in that I, who was ever a trooper, should be set to learn the drill of mud-crunchers, no.

KING: Since our good God hath created Flanders full of mud and us to fight there, we must as Christians part joyfully with our horses.

BRISSAC: I have forgot the particulars of the faith, but if I am called by my King and country to dig my grave in Flanders mud, 'tis done.

KING: The man who digs his own grave fills it more honourably than he that depends upon the favour of an hireling sexton. . . . Shalt stand near me in the trenches, chimney boy, and if one round shot strike us . . .

BRISSAC (*dropping on his knee*): Majesty! The servant then shall go before his master.

KING (*patting him on the shoulder and indicating LISETTE*): Here's one to say farewell.

LISETTE: Your Majesty. (*Flinging her arms round BRISSAC.*) My man, my man!

BRISSAC: Nay, the King's man, sweetheart, now till war be done.

LISETTE: Is that all you have to say to me?

BRISSAC: Nay, sweetheart, this: I'll wed thee if I come back safe and sound.

LISETTE (*in tears*): If thou come not I shall die

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

BRISSAC: Nay, sweetheart, chirrup. If I fall thou shalt dream of me till my better come, and then no instant more.

LISETTE: Wouldst thou have it so?

BRISSAC: I would have it so, as I'm a gentleman. Farewell.

CALVIN: Fall in!

[Trumpets sound.]

BRISSAC (*taking his place*): Farewell.

LISETTE (*follows him*): Nay, I'll stay by thee till the last.

CALVIN (*having aligned the men with his halberd, addresses them in an exalted voice*): Christian soldiers . . . good men and true . . . Remember when anon the roaring of the lions of destruction falls upon your ears, that you are all . . . I repeat, all of you, all . . . All by the nature of your calling predestined to evil here and hereafter. (*Flinging up his voice in exhortation.*) Therefore fear not.

BOBILOT: I shall fear nothing but to have thee as sergeant in hell, Jock Calvin.

BRISSAC: Peace! The King speaks.

KING (*to crowd*): My people!

ALL: The King! The King! Listen to the King!

KING: France is invaded. . . . Maybe for my fault. . . .

ALL: He talks about his fault. What was his fault?

KING: I sinned like David. . . . David was of old the greatest of great kings in Israel.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

TELLIER: I know, please Your Majesty. . . . His wife mocked at him.

KING (*furious at the interruption tears at his wig*): Go wash thy bottles.

[TELLIER *subsides in crowd and is hustled off*.

KING: David sinned,
Yet was he a great king in Israel.

BALZAC (*low to the KING*): Your wig's askew.

KING: Devil take my wig. (*Tears it off.*)

I go not like a coxcomb to the wars
That's all behind me—give me a night-cap
To save my Majesty from catching cold.

(*A red night-cap is handed to him. He looks at it.*)

Why, here's the very cap of liberty—
It is an omen that France shall be free
For ever from all foreign tyranny.

(*As he puts it on the crowd cheers.*)

ALL: France shall be free!
For ever from all foreign tyranny!

KING: Free mayhap some day from such sinful kings
as poor old Harry.

ALL (*shouting tumultuously*): No, no! The King! The King!

[*Flourish of trumpets.*

KING (*raising his hand*): My people! (*There is silence.*)
Old Harry now is marching to his grave. . . .
Let you all pray he find it in the field
And that he die that Victory may live
Where France's banners wave . . .
Cry St. Denis,

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

ALL: (*with a mighty shout*) St. Denis!

KING: My horse! (*When he is mounted.*) Strike drum. (*Sharp rattle of drums.*) Come, gentlemen! (*To the air of "Charmante Gabrielle" played on fife and drum the troops move off. The KING last, crying over the hubbub, as he rides to GILLES and ALIDA:*) Remember, France wants soldiers, (*and to MADAME DURAND*) And farewell, gentle-handed Joan, farewell for evermore. [*Exit.*]

GILLES (*wild with excitement*): I'll follow the King.

ALIDA (*masterfully detaining him*): Stay here by me; what is the King to us?

BOILEAU (*delighted, dancing*): Ha, ha! who's going to be the grey mare? Cupid be praised, I'm a bachelor. . . . I'm a free man. (*Suddenly inspired.*) Good-bye all, I'll follow the King.

[*Dashes off after the army.*]

LISETTE (*looking after him*): Fancy that now!

MADAME DURAND (*mastering her emotion turns to her family*): Dear husband, son-in-law, daughter dear.

DURAND (*blowing his nose*): There, whate'er befall, we must be merry on this wedding-day.

[*Re-enter BOILEAU panting.*]

LISETTE (*contemptuously*): You didn't follow the King very far.

BOILEAU (*apologetically, still panting*): True, true, the King's in an awful hurry for a man going maybe to his death. When I got to the turn of the road there was naught to be seen but just a cloud of dust. The King and his army,

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

banners and all, all the grandeur you saw here were .
were all just dust blowing down the road.

[A heavy rumbling noise is heard from far away.]

MADAME DURAND: What, are we all but dust blowing down the road?

[Distant noise again. Enter GASTON from inn. He looks around bewildered but still dignified.]

GASTON (*with unctuous condescension*): Good people, why is my rest disturbed . . .? What mean these excursions and alarums . . .? Where is His Majesty the King?

BOILEAU: Gone to the wars. . . . And look what he's left behind.

[Picks up the wig and offers it to GASTON.]

GASTON (*mastering his horror*): Just heavens! He has taken leave of his majestic senses. Gone to the wars without his crown? Impossible! . . . I must pursue at once. (*To TELLIER.*) Innkeeper, horses!

BOILEAU: All the horses are gone already and you'll never overtake the army anyhow. They're in an awful bustle to get killed. And the King ahead of them all determined to die first. He won't want to be bothered with you.

GASTON (*witheringly*): Know, fellow, that a king cannot die improperly attired. (*Tenderly combing the wig.*) Besides, this mood of his will pass. . . . His Majesty and I . . .

[He takes a large white handkerchief from his bosom and with the most respectful movements lays the wig upon it.]

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

BOILEAU: What d'you mean by His Majesty and you?

GASTON (*with melancholy dignity*): His Majesty and I . . . (*in a voice choked with emotion*), we shall be faithful to one another unto death.

[*He turns to go, carrying the wig as in a litter in his handkerchief.*]

BOILEAU (*open-mouthed, offering to stop him*): I say . . . you don't mean to say . . . Where are you going?

GASTON (*ecstatically*): I follow the King!

[*Exit down the road carrying the handkerchief in front of him and pointing his toes majestically.*]

BOILEAU (*looking after him*): Now isn't that a silly fellow? He'll never overtake the army . . . and if he did (*there is quite a loud detonation. He shrinks back.*) What's that?

DURAND (*looking up*): Why, it's thunder! Thunder from a clear sky.

BOILEAU: Thunder, was it! (*Looking down the road.*) I say, that fellow is gone like the others, wig and all. (*Noise again, louder. He shrinks as before.*) Is that thunder?

MADAME DURAND: 'Tis cannon, well I know it.

ALL (*in consternation*): Cannon?

[*Noise yet louder. BOILEAU creeps back towards the group.*]

MADAME DURAND (*in a deep, quiet voice, sinking on her knees*): God defend the King!

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

LISETTE (*clenching her hands desperately and glaring down the road*): And give me back my man!

[*Bursts into tears.*]

ALL (*kneeling*): God defend the King and give us back our men!

[*Cannon loudly and continuously until the curtain falls, when it dies away, while "Charmante Gabrielle" becomes audible above it.*]

CURTAIN

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Continued from page 2

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